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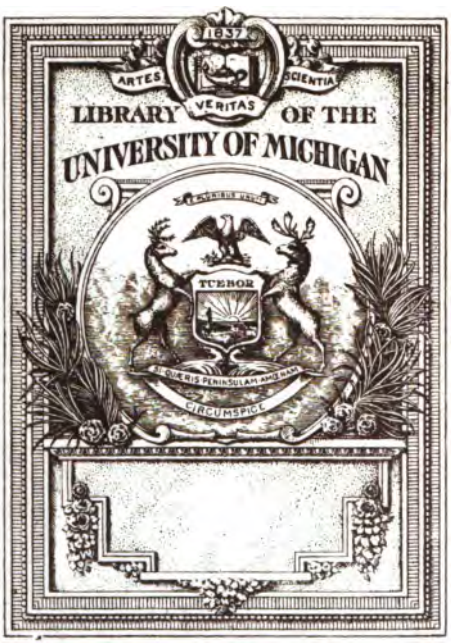
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THE WISE WOMAN

A NOVEL

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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THE WISE WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

WITH THE FIRST SNOW.

"Is your pain any better?" asked Silas Hodgson, putting his gray head and his good-natured face in at his wife's bedroom door. The afternoon had seemed very long to him. He spoke doubtfully and stroked his rough beard. That short beard was a great comfort to the old man in times of apprehension like the present. He always grasped it when called upon to solve a problem, or when in need of moral support. "I thought I heard ye stirrin'," he continued gently and tentatively after a pause. It seemed to him many hours that he had debarred himself from speech.

There came an inarticulate murmur from the recumbent woman on the bed, who lay with her back toward him.

"A little, did ye say?" He turned his head sideways to catch any further response, and, as none came, a shade of disappointment clouded the kind, simple face. "Well, let me know if I can

do anything for ye, Ma," and he left the room and returned to the sitting-room window, from which he had been listlessly gazing for ten minutes previous to making his futile appeal.

They lived alone in the old farmhouse, this couple. Only one child had been given to them, and the three months of her little life had already retreated twenty years into the background of their experience; yet for the sweet sake of that tiny baby the parents were "Ma" and "Pa" to each other to-day.

The old man glanced at the loud-ticking clock, and sighed unconsciously. The tortoise-shell cat, which had been asleep before the glowing fire in the Franklin stove, stretched her elastic body to a preternatural length, and then approached her master with deliberate dignity and leaped to the window-sill, where she arched her back beneath his hand as she, too, gazed forth on the country-side.

"I do believe it 's begun to snow, Tab," observed the sociable man, glad of an excuse to speak again. Then he turned his face toward the half-open door of the bedroom. "It 's snowin', Ma," he announced timidly, yet with some hopefulness. He could not resist trying the effect of this announcement of the first snow of the season. Perhaps it might exorcise the spirit of pain. No response from the bedroom.

"Not spittin', ye know; actually snowin'," he added, in the same raised tone.

This time he did not strain his ears in vain for an answer. It came in somewhat thick but decided accents.

"I want you should leave me alone, Pa."

An abashed look crept over the man's weather-beaten face. He grasped his beard, and whistled inaudibly as he turned quickly back, and again gave his attention to the wide, level, russet fields stretching away to where the sand dunes hid the sea.

Then for a while his wife slept, and waking, much relieved, lamented her own severity. "'T won't do to question the dispensations o' Providence," she groaned; "but I do wish men could knit, or make crazy-quilts, or amuse themselves some way, come fall weather." Then aloud, faintly: "Pa."

"Yes, Ma," meekly.

"Could n't you whittle out some pegs for these windows? They made a racket all night."

"I did that this mornin'." Then, once more encouraged, "It 's snowin' righ' down, Ma."

Mrs. Hodgson rose from her bed and appeared, still pale, in the doorway, fastening the small three-cornered cap she wore.

"Why, so 't is," she responded, looking out on the light whirling flakes. "Well, it 's time for it."

"Set down here in the big chair and let me get ye a cup o' tea," said the relieved husband, beaming with contentment. "It 's jest all ye need now to set ye up."

"I guess 't is," she answered, "but I 'd better make it myself."

"No, you won't. You ain't fit to. It 's a half hour yet to supper-time. Set still;" and the old man moved with alacrity into the kitchen, from which immediately began to proceed a series of noises which stirred Mrs. Hodgson's housewifely soul with ever-increasing apprehension.

"The new kettle 's the one you better use," she suggested, sitting forward in her chair and listening alertly, while smothered objurgations from the kitchen followed each fresh clatter.

"Silas, you better let me" — she began at last.

"There now, I 'm all right," declared her invisible spouse manfully. "I know a thing or two, let me tell ye. When I make a cup o' tea I don't try to git a whole gallon o' water to bile. I take jest sich a quantity and it 's ready on time." His genial face here appeared as he moved to the china closet and brought forth a cup and saucer.

"Not that one, Pa," pleaded his wife. "I 'd jest as soon have a common one."

"No, ma'am. The best ain't any too good for you," returned the other, beaming, as he bore off the dainty old cup in triumph. "When we set out to be stylish we know how to do it, I hope."

He disappeared, and it required all the goodness of Mrs. Hodgson's heart to deter her from following him. She sat nearer than ever to the edge of her chair, and her pulses beat nervously

in the silence that followed. It was soon ended by an ominous sharp crash in the kitchen, and simultaneously a ring at the front doorbell pealed through the house.

"Silas Hodgson, you hain't broken that cup!" Acute dismay paralyzed the speaker and effectually prevented her from rising.

"All to flinders, Ma," was the slow, dejected response. "It jest slipped away from me like — like lightnin'" —

"I did n't want you should take it," groaned his wife, at last appearing on the scene where the old man was kneeling on the hearth, brushing the delicate fragments into one hand with the big, stiff fingers of the other.

"There goes that bell again!" he exclaimed with alacrity. "I 'll jest step out and see who 't is in all this storm. They better stayed to home, *I* think;" and, thanking Fate for a diversion, he rose from his kneeling posture, dropped the flecks of china upon the edge of the sink, and hurried away through the hall. Opening the house door he admitted a blast of November wind, and saw a young woman waiting on the step, the shoulders of her fashionable jacket already white with snow, and her dark eyes brightening with satisfaction at sight of him.

"How do you do?" she said cheerily, putting out her neatly gloved hand. Mr. Hodgson regarded her uncomprehendingly, and returned the greeting mechanically. "I began to be so afraid

there might be no one at home. It would have served me right, of course," she added gayly, "but it would have been awkward." She turned toward a dépot-carriage waiting at the gate. "You can go," she said with a nod to the driver.

Tardy but pleased recognition stole over the host's face. "Hoh! If 't ain't Kitty Ormond!" he ejaculated. "Well, where 'd you snow down from? Right in the nick o' time, too," added the old man in confidential tones, as he drew her inside and closed the door behind her. "Jest had an accident here. I 've busted one o' Grandma Fletcher's cups. Triflin', good-for-nothin' things they be. No more substance to 'em than bubbles. Doshed fool I was to touch it. It 's worked Ma all up. You fix it, Kitty, like a good child. Gimme your bag. P'raps you might 's well go in first."

Katherine Ormond had listened to the opening of this confession with a sober countenance. She had large brown eyes placed well apart under curving eyebrows which, with the firm, small mouth and the opaque whiteness of her fine skin, gave her face a very serious expression. By the time the old man had finished, emphasizing his last remark with a gently suggestive shove, the girl's eyes had nearly disappeared between their lashes, showing only a narrow space of dancing light; the delicate lips had broadened into an appreciative smile, and it was the merriest face

imaginable that appeared in Mrs. Hodgson's sitting-room just as that lady emerged disconsolate from the kitchen door.

The girl walked straight up to her hostess, who stared into the smiling face, then retreated a step in her surprise.

"Why — why" — she stammered. "'T ain't Kitty! Turn 'round and let me get the light on you. Is it really you, child? What does this mean?"

"You know you said I might, Mrs. Hodgson. You said I might, any time." The girl put her hand on the other's shoulder and kissed her.

The hostess began fumbling at the fastenings of her guest's jacket, looking her pleasure, and expressing it somewhat incoherently. Her husband, reconnoitring through the crack of the hall door, and observing that there was no room at present in the mental atmosphere for a memory of mishaps, followed the social bent of his nature, and entered the room.

"Wa'n't a kittiwake the last bird you expected to see fly into the house to-day, Ma?" he inquired, with ingratiating cheerfulness. "She come right in on that last gust."

"And oh, it seems so nice to be here!" said the girl with enthusiasm. "I did n't surprise you too much, did I, Mrs. Hodgson? It is your own fault if I did. You remember when I was here last?"

"Yes, I recollect, but it 's goin' on two years,

Kitty. Here, Pa, take her things into the bedroom. Are your feet wet, dear?"

"No; I'm all right. Let me sit right down here beside you in front of this lovely blaze, and explain myself. It can be done briefly. You know when I was here last I had written for permission to spend a few days with you, and when I went away after the visit, you told me to come thereafter any time I felt like it without troubling myself to write you, because this was one of my homes. Have you forgotten?"

Mrs. Hodgson smiled into the coaxing face. "No, indeed."

"Well, I didn't expect to obey you literally. I meant at least to give you warning when the fit next seized me; but circumstances, or perhaps I ought to be honest and say my own impatience, didn't give me time. I never thought of coming until last night, and after that I couldn't wait. I knew if worse came to worst, there was a tavern in Pokonet. Shall I go there now?" The speaker glanced up with the half-loving, half-saucy expression which had long been familiar to her hostess.

"You look this minute just as you used to when you was five years old," said Mrs. Hodgson, smoothing the girl's fine hand, and becoming so conscious of the roughness of her own in the movement that she instantly ceased the caress. "You can stay here," she finished, leaning back in her seat.

"We used to have pretty good times, hey?" suggested Mr. Hodgson, drawing up a chair for himself on the guest's other side.

"Good times!" she repeated warmly. "There never were such good times. Poor little children who don't spend their summers at Pokonet! What do they know of bliss?" The girl leaned her chin on her hand and gazed at the red coals. "I often wonder, Mr. Hodgson, how it was you could spare so much time to us children as you used to."

The old man thought his wife was going to speak. They had not always agreed about what proportion of a summer day should be given to play; so he broke in hurriedly: "Oh, I donno as I gave you so very much time."

The girl went on: "What with boating, and crabbing, and fishing, and wading in the pond, or going into the surf, I don't think there was a man on Long Island so hard-worked as you."

Silas Hodgson sent a furtive look toward his wife.

She smiled. "It was just the sort of work Pa liked," she remarked.

"Then we would come in," continued Miss Ormond dreamily, "and eat your good dinners and suppers, and they were the best in the world. And oh, why did we grow up!" she finished expressively.

"I 'm free to say I 've missed you," returned Mrs. Hodgson. "You three children got to seemin'

as if you belonged to us, comin' so steady every summer from the time you was babies."

"Yes," the girl sighed; "I was sorry enough when it seemed best for us to begin to step out of the beaten track."

"Hope you enjoyed yourself this summer past, Kitty," said her host, regarding her affectionately.

"Yes, we had a gay season, both at the sea and at the mountains. Then afterward, Madeline and Gilbert and I went to a house party at Lenox. The fact is, I 'm tired. I don't believe I was intended for a gay life. When we settled down at home this fall, I found that everything seemed more or less of a burden, and I was listless, and did n't know what I wanted, when all of a sudden I waked up to the fact that I had n't had any Pokonet. Why, of course that explained everything. So here I am."

"And now we 're starvin' you, dearie!" exclaimed Mrs. Hodgson. "It 's just supper-time. I have n't been first-rate to-day, and" —

"And so Mr. Hodgson and I are going to get supper," said the girl, suddenly rising decidedly.

"No, no," protested her hostess, pushing her chair back. "What do you think, Kitty; just before you came in Pa 'd broke one o' the Fletcher cups!" The statement was made despairingly and with symptoms of tears.

"Now Ma, don't ye take on about that," coaxed her husband, made courageous by the guest's

presence. "I promise not to touch a thing ye could bust with the hammer. I 'll only wait on Kitty. She knows where everything is; don't ye, Kittiwake?"

His meek eagerness and Miss Ormond's cheerful reassurances prevailed upon Mrs. Hodgson, who sat back in her chair and watched the lively preparations for tea with placid approval.

"Of course mother and Madeline sent their love," said Katherine, when at last they were seated at table.

"And Gilly," said the old man, as he passed his guest some cold meat. "How 's Gilly? He was a plucky little chap. I s'pose I would n't hardly know him now."

Miss Ormond laughed. "How comical it sounds to hear that name again, and how cross it made him when we first called him by it; but he was a gilly sometimes, and truth compelled. No, I don't believe you would know him," she added. "He has n't been to Pokonet since he entered college, and he is — he has changed a good deal."

"The children will grow up," remarked Mrs. Hodgson. "Maidie shot from a child into a young lady the suddenest I ever saw."

"That Maidie was always a smart little jade," put in her husband, with an admiring, reminiscent smile.

"I s'pose she 's a regular grown-up woman now," continued his wife. "You know we had her down here awhile summer before last."

"Yes; it is n't easy to wean us entirely from Pokonet; but I owe Madeline a grudge, for I think it is her fault after all that we are n't still coming here every summer in the good old way. She has grown popular in a certain set, who have dragged us off in search of interests that don't interest — some of us. That is, not so much as they do her."

"Ah, my dear," Mrs. Hodgson patted the girl's hand, "you have changed least of all. Ain't she just the same, Pa?"

"Yes; I can see her now, flyin' down the sands with her little gray and white gown and her black shoes, for all the world like a kittiwake; and a good sight she was always for these eyes; and a good sight she is yet. Glad ye come, Kitty."

"So am I," she answered happily; "but the people at home were surprised enough when I announced my intention. I told them I could come better now than when we got deeper into work and play, and off I started. I felt a little guilty, for the sky looked like a storm; but I thought I would run a race with the snow. Perhaps I should get here first; but no, indeed; it caught me on the road. How it whirls down now! What fun to be cozily shut in with you! You see you don't know what a wearing thing it is to be a popular, fashionable girl's sister!" she added, with mock seriousness.

"Is Maidie more popular 'n you be, Kitty?" asked Mr. Hodgson, curiously.

"She ain't better lookin'," observed his wife in an impartial tone, which caused a new disappearance of her guest's eyes behind their lashes.

"Oh!" she ejaculated, with a soft, high little cry, making a gesture of dismay. "I am only a faint shadow of Madeline. Why, indeed, Mrs. Hodgson," added the girl, with honest heartiness and wide-open eyes, "Madeline is the most beautiful girl I ever saw."

"You don't say," said Mr. Hodgson.

"I want to know," remarked his wife.

"Yes, indeed; it is n't the least wonder that people want to see her about, and that she has three partners to another girl's one, and all the rest of it; but the sister of a belle does n't always walk in a path of roses. Another cup of tea, please, dear Mrs. Hodgson. Modesty forbids me to praise it as it deserves, but actions speak louder than words. You see, there are the lovers; and I don't know why, but they gravitate to me just as naturally" —

"Great fools if they did n't," remarked Silas Hodgson; "but look out, Kitty. Ye 're young yet. It 's dreadful easy to make a mistake."

The girl's laugh rang out spontaneously. "Not my lovers. Oh, no. Madeline's. Some of them are moths who refrain by reason of various motives from really getting into the candle flame, but a few have rushed upon their fate, and then, when they find themselves hurt, they invariably turn to me to be comforted."

"That 's a good mission, my child," said Mrs. Hodgson seriously, "to bind up the broken-hearted."

"I don't like it at all," protested her guest. "You have no idea how embarrassing it is sometimes. The last victim fell at Lenox a few weeks ago, and yesterday, right at home in Montaigne, I had the bad luck to meet him on a street corner, and he *would* stop and talk about Madeline, and look white, and I had to beat about and try to think of something consoling to suggest, and could n't at all. I don't know what I did say at last, but I made up my mind to come to Pokonet right away. I knew there was n't anybody here whom Madeline had refused."

Mr. Hodgson continued eating his supper industriously.

"I did some think Tom was sweet on her that time she was here two summers ago," he remarked.

Color came pinkly into Miss Ormond's white face. "Oh, yes, how is Tom?" she asked hastily. "I have n't forgotten what an interest he was to you and Mrs. Hodgson. You know I was here when his parents died and he first came to you from out West, — Michigan, was n't it, where he lived? Such a solemn-looking boy."

"Well he might look solemn, the dear child," said Mrs. Hodgson, "leaving all his friends and coming to perfect strangers like us, even if we were his uncle and aunt. We 're proud of Tom, just as proud as we can be."

"I am sure he ought to be devoted to you, since you did so much for his education."

"Oh, he had something," explained Mrs. Hodgson. "We helped him out, as of course we ought to. It was a great thing for him to go through the Institute, worth all the effort we could make."

"Has he graduated?"

"Certainly, a year ago. We always thought Stevens men could get good positions the minute they were out; but 't ain't always so, as Tom found. He 's been workin' at one thing and another till this fall he 's really got a place he likes in Newark. His sister has come on and joined him, and they are as happy as birds by their letters. She seems to be smart 's a whip, too. She stayed a week down here in August, and we liked her first-rate; did n't we, Pa?"

"Yes; the girl 's got snap to her, and she favors my sister, too. That 's sayin' enough for her looks."

"Your mother 's well, Kitty?" asked Mrs. Hodgson.

"Yes, very well, thank you. The busiest one in the family, as usual. She belongs to so many clubs and societies."

"Who keeps house, then?"

"I do. I have a gift for it. Look at me!"

"Don't that beat all! I should think she 'd be afraid you 'd be extravagant."

"It does n't matter quite so much about that as it used to. Mr. Arnold, who has helped mother

in her affairs since father died, has invested the money so successfully that we have a little more leeway than at the time you used to hear mother talk about them."

"That 's clever."

"Yes, it is very convenient. It keeps mother young not to have to worry."

Mrs. Hodgson looked thoughtfully into her guest's face, so thoughtfully and so long that Katherine stirred uneasily.

"Well?" she asked, smiling.

"Well, I was only thinkin' that I guessed you were probably an important member of your family."

The girl spread out her hands. "All wrong, my dear Mrs. Hodgson. I am only the general utility member. Somebody says: 'Everybody is needed. Nobody is needed much.' I 'm not needed much. But I *can* make tea. You haven't said what good tea this is."

"It 's capital, Kitty. You 've done me lots o' good."

CHAPTER II.

MARGUERITE.

KATHERINE stayed with her old friends until the sun shone brightly again, and the last traces of mud following the pretty snowstorm had hardened in a frost.

Her entertainers felt reluctant to see her depart.

"May the notion take ye soon again, Kitty," said the host, as she stepped out of his wagon upon the dépot platform.

"I hope it won't, Mr. Hodgson," returned the girl cheerily. "I feel toned up and in fine condition. You would better hope that I will be contented now to stay at home and behave myself."

"You always behave yourself," was the rather dejected reply.

"I 'll tell mother you said so." Miss Ormond's bright eyes hid between her lashes as she smiled and waved her hand, for the train was coming.

Silas Hodgson nodded, and pulled his beard as he sat, allowing the reins to lie loosely upon his imperturbable horse.

Katherine waved her hand once more to him from the car window as the train pulled out.

The reminiscent smile on her lips scarcely faded

before she reached Long Island City; and when she had crossed New York and taken the train at Hoboken for her suburban home, it returned.

"Montaigne!" yelled the brakeman at last, and she left the cars. Her innocent escapade was over, but the aroma of it was fresh in her heart when she met her mother, in careful street dress, at the gate of their modern, pretty home.

"I have had such a good time!" she declared, greeting her affectionately.

"You look it, Katherine," returned Mrs. Ormond, regarding her daughter with a scrutiny in which curiosity had a part. "You found Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson well, of course."

"Yes, and they sent so much love to you."

Mrs. Ormond laughed leniently, and gave the hand she was holding an affectionate parting shake. "Much obliged to them. I should like to see them myself, but I 'm afraid it would n't occur to me to make the trip just at this time."

"But you know I was so tired, traveling around."

Her mother's eyes twinkled. "So you thought you would jump into the bramble-bush?"

"Bramble-bush! As if dear old Pokonet was anything like the places we have rushed about all summer."

"Well, good-by. I must n't be late for the hospital board meeting. It is all right, Katherine, even if I don't quite understand you. Some hens do hatch ducks."

"Thank you, mother; I 'm so glad you think I 'm a duck," and the girl threw a kiss after the retreating figure, as she walked backward up the path and entered the house.

"Well, Katherine, is that you!" exclaimed a voice, quickly followed by a lithe, slim figure as a girl appeared from the depths of an armchair. "It seems as if you had been gone a year."

The heartiness of their greeting showed the attachment that existed between the sisters. Madeline Ormond was a fair-haired, blue-eyed beauty, sufficiently striking in appearance to excuse the superlatives which a partial sister had employed in speaking of her to the Hodgsons.

"I am glad that is over," continued Madeline, seating herself and returning to her task of examining a box of odds and ends of millinery.

"What? Hugging me? Thanks," returned Katherine, removing her wraps.

"You know well enough what I mean. This freak of yours. Pokonet — Poky-net, I should prefer to call it at this season."

"Bless its pokiness!" uttered Katherine devoutly.

"You were caught in a snowstorm, too."

"Indeed I was, a lovely one. It was so cosy, shut in there with the Hodgsons, living over good old times!"

"Ugh! Excuse me from that form of dissipation. You are rightly named, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!"

"Why? Because I like the fire?" Katherine curled up in the corner of a divan and watched the blazing logs on their heavy brass andirons.

"No; but because you cannot be torn from old associations."

Katherine made a repressive gesture.

"Control your impatience, Madeline, to hear all about it, and I will tell you the Pokonet news."

"No, you won't, my dear. I presume the sea and the dunes and the pond and the Hodgsons are all there, and all the same as they were two years ago when I saw them. *Voilà tout.* We are invited to a tea at the Allingtons' on Monday, and the Arnolds are going to have a Thanksgiving dance in their new barn. It is all to be decorated with grain and fruit and vegetables, and the stables are to be furnished with divans and rugs and colored lanterns. Won't they make jolly little twosing corners? A conservatory can't compare."

"Twosing! What 's that?"

"Don't you know? I guessed right away when Ed Arnold used the word the other evening. He is authority on the latest 'sabre cuts of Saxon speech.' At any rate, you 'll find out what it means at the dance. Ed will show you. He is always so philanthropic, and willing to instruct the young."

"The Hodgsons asked all about Maidie," said Katherine, with mild reproach.

"Well, of course you told them. I trust myself in your hands willingly. I 'm very glad you had a good time. You know that. I only don't see how you could, that is all."

"I feel as if I had been smoothed the right way, and been patted comfortingly, for days," said Katherine dreamily.

Her sister laughed. "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!" she repeated. "You don't mind being thought kittenish, do you?"

"Tom graduated all right," went on the elder.

Madeline raised her pretty eyes inquiringly. "Tom who?"

"Tom Sheldon."

"Oh." Madeline returned to her velvet and feathers. "I remember now, he was in some college."

"You would better remember," said Kate, with spirit. "He was at Pokonet two years ago, when you went there to stay a week and stayed a fortnight because he *was* there. I just wish I had been with you."

Madeline raised her delicate eyebrows. "Your tone suggests that the longing is not prompted by affection, *ma chère*."

"No, it is n't," replied Katherine emphatically. "I wish I had been there to bring you home in the one week."

"Why, what harm did I do, honey?" Madeline spoke abstractedly as she continued to ransack the millinery box, separating its contents into little piles.

"I don't know; but Mr. Hodgson said he had an idea that Tom was sweet on you."

"And you are vexed with me for that?" in surprise.

"Oh, when he said that I didn't know what might have happened. I remembered vaguely that you laughed about Tom when you came home. Nothing would be so bad as hurting one of those people," finished Katherine, rather incoherently.

Madeline laughed. "The idea of exciting yourself over a two-year-old offense — I mean supposing it was an offense."

"Tell me all about it," said Katherine, imperiously.

"Little girls should say 'please,'" remarked her sister.

"Please do, Madeline."

"Why, I only remember in the vaguest way," replied the girl carelessly. "He was the bathing-master there that summer."

"He was? I had forgotten, if you told me that."

"Yes, it seems he did everything he could to earn money, summers."

"That was Christian of him," said Katherine with interest and satisfaction, "not to want to be more of an expense than was necessary to those dear old people."

"Oh yes. He was a very decent fellow, and the girls all liked him. There were a number of girls there when I was. He was proud, too, and

very stand-off with us all. You know how free and easy that beach life is, but his attitude was always: 'I remember that I am bathing-master. Though I touch your hand, it is in the way of business.' Of course, if he had been ugly, it would n't have mattered; but the fact was, he was rather good-looking and splendidly built, and the girls were graciousness itself to him. There was n't another man there as attractive — and, well, — you know your little sister. Modesty forbids me to specify, but you know the sequel. Where," diving about in the box at her side, "is that jet butterfly?"

"Madeline Ormond," said Katherine, who was regarding her with wide, anxious eyes, "you encouraged him!"

Madeline shrugged her shoulder. "I can truthfully say that I never saw a man who required it more."

Her sister sat upright. "Did he propose to you? Did Tom Sheldon propose to you? I tell you now that if he did, you have proved by your confession it was your own fault, and I shall be ashamed of it always. I would n't have gone to Pokonet if I had known. Instead, I would have hidden my head from those dear people who have been so devoted to us!"

Madeline looked into the excited face in astonishment.

"But all this is two years past," she protested mildly.

"Then you did do it." Katherine made an indignant gesture.

"I beg your pardon," said the younger, returning her gaze, "I have n't said so, and I don't intend to. If you had asked me before you went to Pokonet, and offered to stay at home in case of my guilt, there might have been a motive for incriminating myself, for I did n't at all want you to go; but the prospect of your being ashamed of me forever is not sufficiently tempting to wring a confession from me. My dear Katherine, you 're a goose! Why, for pity's sake," in exasperation, "you are really crying;" for two drops ran swiftly down from Kate's bright eyes. "What folly! Of course I did many things two years ago that I would n't do now. There, then, if you will have it, Tom Sheldon never did propose to me. I saw it coming, and I ran away. How absurd you are, Katherine," for the latter looked little mollified. "If you could only see your *protégé* now, I fancy it would show your sympathy in a ridiculous light. He has forgotten my existence, as I had forgotten his, I am sure; and he is a very robust party."

"He is the Hodgsons' idol," said Katherine briefly.

"And you say he graduated all right?" returned her sister, with the interest which the occasion evidently demanded. "How gratifying to them."

Katherine leaned back among her pillows. "Whatever you did, those dear people spoke as kindly as ever of Maidie."

"Proof positive that I behaved well," returned the other gayly, "and left a good reputation behind me."

"I hope so."

"What do you suppose I'm doing, Katherine?"

"I can see."

"It would be safe to wager that a dozen other girls in Montaigne are doing the same thing this morning," went on Madeline. "A new fad has developed since you went away."

"As suddenly as that?"

"Yes. Do you remember the new milliner, mother liked so much?"

"The one who has 'Marguerite' on her window?"

"Yes. She has suddenly sprung into popularity, and the latest thing is to take lessons of her. Lots of the girls have begun."

"Then you are going to join the ranks, I suppose."

"I thought of having you do it." Madeline looked up, smiling. "You are so much cleverer than I with your hands. Don't you want to?"

"Laziness!" commented the elder.

"No, modesty. You know I am clumsy with a needle."

"Why not take the lessons together?" suggested Katherine.

"Mademoiselle refuses to take more than one at a time. She has an eye to the main chance,

you see, and is bound to make the most of her popularity. She is quite autocratic, they say."

"Better keep in the swim, Madeline. You need outlets for your energy. Think what a fine one it would be to trim three sets of hats and bonnets for your family! I would n't rob you of the opportunity for the world."

"Oh, I dare say I could learn," replied the younger, "if you are not going to take an interest."

"Well, it is rather late in the season. I have all the hats I want for the present. Marguerite did n't make them either."

"No, if she had, you would be more enthusiastic. It was clever of her to wait until she had hatted what fall customers she could get before she offered to give these lessons. She is a shrewd one, evidently. Well, I am going to leave you. So dream away of sand dunes till I come back. I am off to Marguerite. I am ashamed to confess that I have n't seen her yet, myself."

Madeline rose with her spoils, and went, humming, from the room. When she came downstairs again, she was surprised to see that her sister had resumed her hat and coat.

"Oh yes, I am going to chaperone you to your destination," remarked Katherine. "I 'm going to see that you are not being led away by youthful folly. Where are your fuss and feathers?"

"I am not going to carry anything to-day. I have n't arranged for lessons yet, and don't know what is required."

The girls walked down the street with the easy accord in step which proved their habit of companionship. Their tongues flew faster than their feet, as they talked of the winter plans; schemes for their mission and sewing-school work being discussed with the same zest bestowed upon their ball-gowns and literary clubs. Montaigne had its manufacturing district and its slums, where, on a small scale, the sad squalor of life equaled that to be found within the boundaries of its big neighbor New York; and society furnished charitable workers in the small city as well as in the great one.

The girls reached the main street, and scorning conveyances, kept on their even way until they reached the building which was their destination. Its first floor was occupied by two stores, between which a flight of stairs led upward. On the second story, at the left side, was a bay window, and upon its middle sheet of glass was gilded the name "Marguerite." Several bonnets were visible upon standards within, if one stood far enough out upon the edge of the walk to look up at them.

"An inconvenient place, I should think," was Katherine's comment. "There is Betty Arnold," she added.

A young lady came swiftly down the stairs, as she spoke, and greeted the sisters brightly.

"You poor benighted girls!" she ejaculated. "If you only knew how to make such a fold as I can!"

"You are taking lessons, then?" returned Katherine.

"Why, it was Betty who started the whole thing," said Madeline.

"Certainly; Mademoiselle had made me a hat, and it was exquisite, and I was telling her how I wished I could do such a thing. She remarked that there was no need of my doing it, and I told her that there was no need of my painting on china, but that I did it, and I didn't add that my work was atrocious. I said I thought such a hat was just as good as a picture, and she volunteered then to teach me what she could. So, you know, we girls are like sheep anyway, and as soon as I started, a lot of the other girls did, and Mademoiselle is going to make a pretty good thing out of it. Are you sheep, too?"

"I'm not sure," replied Madeline languidly, raising her eyebrows. "Betty is so conceited," she added, after the merry-eyed girl had left them. "It is too provoking that she should think I do it because she does. Betty Arnold isn't the sort of girl to set any fashion."

"So this woman is French," said Katherine, as they started up the stairs. Rapidly in her mind's eye she formed the picture of a *crêpée* blonde head, dark eyelashes, a wasp waist, and a set smile.

"Marguerite" was in small black letters on a glass door to the left of the stairs as they ascended, and another sign invited them to walk in. They opened the door, and entered a light room fur-

nished with a small, glass-inclosed counter, two or three wicker chairs, a Japanese screen, and the sparsely filled metal branches in the bay window. The room was evidently the parlor of a flat, and there were a few photographs beside the clock on the mantelpiece above the hard-coal fire.

Immediately a singularly handsome girl raised the portière and entered the room. She was lame, and her black dress made her slight figure look still more childlike as she raised her eyes inquiringly toward the visitors.

"Very French," thought Katherine, viewing the dark features.

"What can I do for you?" inquired the girl softly, with a marked accent.

"We wish to see the milliner, Mademoiselle Marguerite," answered Madeline, in her habitual imperious manner.

"Are the ladies in haste?" asked the girl in a gently polite and musical slow tone, which made the other's seem coarse.

"Well, yes, somewhat," replied Madeline, hesitating a little, and speaking lower.

"I will see at once," said the lame girl, bowing deferentially and retiring behind the portière.

"This is all very odd," murmured Katherine, looking about her curiously. "I should say, if this woman had not happened to make a hit, she would run a good chance of starving up here with nothing more stirring in sight than that Oriental-looking child."

"But look at those bonnets!" returned Madeline convincingly.

The girls moved to the window, and examined the dainty creations with interest.

"Oh, I must take the lessons," said Madeline, her eyes shining with approval. "Aren't they *distinguées*, every one? How quickly one can tell that indescribable French touch. I hope I am reasonably patriotic, but it is an undeniable fact that no American fingers ever could have made those bonnets."

"Beg pardon, ladies," said a voice behind the pair, who had been too absorbed in their scrutiny to hear the entrance of the mistress of the establishment.

They turned quickly, and beheld a young woman regarding them. Her costume was simple, with a simplicity which somewhat irritated Katherine. It was the simplicity of the poverty-stricken heroine of the stage, whose gray gown fits like a glove, and whose *lingerie* is always clear-starched to dainty perfection. The gown defied fashion, and was picturesque in its long, straight lines. Not a curl or a crimp had this tall young woman. Her well-brushed auburn hair was of the fine and soft description which made a pompadour effect as it was carried back into a knot under the high comb. Her deep blue eyes were fearless in their gaze, her nose was slender, and her lips well curved. She seemed to Katherine to be trying to keep those lips in sober order as she stood there, and

to be hiding a laugh in the depths of those wonderfully clear eyes. Altogether, she was a distinguished figure, as far out of the common as was the peculiar knack of style which had set young feminine Montaigne to running over her steep stairs.

"Oh — a" — stammered Madeline Ormond at first in unwonted embarrassment; then quickly recovering her poise: "I was just wishing that I needed one of those pretty hats," she said, with more than a shade of patronage. She was the sort of girl who is accustomed to be flattered and deferred to by those whose business it is to clothe her charming person.

"I wish you did," answered the milliner promptly; "but perhaps you are looking for something lighter."

If there had been amusement in her face when the girls caught their first glimpse of her, it was gone now. She was the alert woman of business, and looked from Madeline to Katherine with an expression which to the latter's acuter perception suggested that time was money.

"I am afraid I must n't want another hat just now," returned Madeline deliberately. "I am Miss Ormond. You made a bonnet for my mother, this fall."

"I remember Mrs. Ormond very well."

"You must make yourself very tempting to draw middle-aged ladies up those stairs."

"I make bonnets only for ladies who feel

young," replied the milliner with the flash of a smile. "Can I do something for you?" she added, after a second of silence.

"We are told that you teach your art," said Katherine, speaking for the first time. "I should like to take lessons."

"You, Katherine?" Madeline spoke in surprise.

"Yes, I most unexpectedly feel the stirring of talent.

"Then I"—

"Then you need n't follow Betty Arnold's lead," said Kate softly, her eyes going into hiding as the milliner walked away to get her book. "You have a reputation to lose. I have n't. Wait and see how I succeed."

"I would so much rather you did it. I said so all the time," returned Madeline, well satisfied with this turn of events.

CHAPTER III.

KATHERINE'S FIRST LESSON.

"You did come home, then," said Gilbert Ormond, as Katherine gave him a hearty hug on his return to dinner that evening. Neither Mrs. Ormond nor Madeline would have thought, under the circumstances, of hugging their budding lawyer, although they were firmly convinced that he was a most remarkable young man, and they loved and admired him as only mothers and sisters can love and admire. They greeted him decorously on the occasions of meeting and parting, but the scrupulous correctness of his appearance never suffered by them.

On the present occasion he was fain to pass a caressing hand over the fair hair at the back of his head after Katherine let him go, but the smile of satisfaction was still on his lips as he seated himself at the foot of the table.

"Now let this be enough of going away," he remarked, as he began to carve the lamb. "Interfering people, busy-bodies like you, are missed from the family circle. How is Pokonet?"

"Beautiful. Mr. Hodgson wanted to know all about Gilly. I told him you were n't so much of

a gilly as you used to be, 'count of having been to college like a nice, bright boy."

"They remember us all, then." Gilbert's small golden moustache curved smilingly.

"Remember us? Why, we are like their own children. We are all the children they have."

"You forget Tom," suggested Madeline mischievously.

"You 'd better, too," retorted Kate briefly.

"I had once, and you resurrected him with such vigor that I have n't quite recovered yet."

"Who is Tom?" inquired Gilbert.

"No one you know."

"Why, yes I do, if you mean Tom Sheldon. He arrived on the scene the last summer I spent at Pokonet. We were great chums. I never told anybody how he dragged me out of the clutches of the under-tow one day. I firmly believe that if he had n't, you would n't have any brother now."

"Gilbert Ormond!" ejaculated his mother, while the girls shuddered.

"I did n't say anything about it at the time, for I well knew I should get my bathing limited to the pond, if mother heard of it. We did n't think much about it, either of us; but I remember Tom was white as a ghost by the time we lay on the beach facing each other. I fancy we had both forgotten it in an hour, but as I look back now, I realize that he acted with a good deal of pluck and promptness. I thought I saw him the other

day in Newark. I met a workman with a rather grimy appearance carrying a tin lunch-box. Tom Sheldon might have grown to look like that man. There was a very familiar expression about the eyes. I thought for a second of speaking to the fellow, and then I considered that it would n't be any particular use. He did n't appear to recognize me."

"Perhaps it was Tom, and it would have been a pleasure to him," said Katherine.

"You certainly ought not to have passed by a possible scion of that sacred Hodgson family," put in Madeline.

"He saved Gilbert's life!" exclaimed the elder sister.

"Ages ago, while they were playing, he possibly did; but Gilbert's imagination probably exaggerates the situation now; and at all events the facts do not warrant his feeling obliged to fall on the neck of a grimy workman with a tin lunch-box, who lives as near as Newark, and might turn out really to *be* Tom and offer to come and see us." Madeline made a grimace and a gesture of dismay, at the same time that her mind involuntarily conjured up a picture of a young athlete in a bathing-suit upon whom her own soft eyes cast gracious glances, and the memory colored her cheeks.

"Tom has done splendidly," said Katherine earnestly to her brother. "He has gone through Stevens" —

"Then Gilbert did n't meet him. Be comforted," said Madeline.

"I am more inclined to think I did," returned Gilbert. "The Stevens men go into machine-shops and begin at the bottom very often. I am glad if Tom has done well. Still gladder to see you back, Katherine," he added, turning to his sister with an air of changing the subject. "I suppose you will settle down now."

"I am going to distinguish myself in an entirely new line," announced Katherine, with a grand air. "Mother, has Madeline told you? Behold your future milliner." She laid her hand on her breast and bowed her head.

"I have heard about these lessons the girls are taking," said Mrs. Ormond. "It is a very good idea."

"So Madeline roped you in, did she?" asked Gilbert. "She has been threatening."

"No, she did n't. I could have stood out against Madeline, and was doing so very well; but that creature hypnotized me."

"The milliner?" asked Mrs. Ormond, smiling.

"Yes. That room up there is the den of a siren. There is something uncanny about that woman."

"Well," remarked Gilbert, "I think the fathers of families should be warned. I can't imagine a much more dangerous character to be at large than a hypnotic milliner."

"That is just what she is," declared Katherine.

"I went, and saw, and was conquered; and when you see what hats I shall make, you will wish you were a woman."

"Oh, Madeline can absorb all the headgear you can construct," returned Gilbert. "That is her specialty. I foresee in the future a perfect orgy of big hats in the style our æsthetic maiden affects."

Madeline raised her lashes and glanced at her brother. She knew he was not the exception among her masculine admirers.

"You are only paying tribute to my cleverness," she remarked. "I do not waste time trying to be a tailor-made girl when I am perfectly aware I am not built for it. Every one should study her own style. Now if that Marguerite had a little more ambition, she need n't be such an odd-looking figure herself. She is a sufficiently good-looking person."

"Ambition! Good-looking!" repeated Katherine. "Madeline, I am surprised at your child-like naïveté. Do you suppose that siren has n't bestowed as much thought on her personal appearance as she does on those bewitching bonnets?"

"She need n't look so absurdly unconventional."

"Of course she need n't; but she wants to. She wishes people to remark the contrast between the up-to-date millinery and the quaint milliner. It is a part of her designing schemes to have that picturesque French cripple as an assistant."

"I can't think a person in her walk of life, a

business woman like that, would be so foolish as to suppose her appearance would be of consequence one way or the other to her customers," rejoined Madeline indifferently.

"That young girl is n't French," put in Mrs. Ormond. "She is an Italian right from our own poor district. Mrs. Arnold was telling me that Mademoiselle Marguerite happened to run across her and took her in charitably. The child herself told her. Her name is Lucia."

"Explosion of bubble number one," said Madeline. "Katherine, you are too imaginative. I am sorry to have you lose any of the accessories you have gifted your teacher with, if it will make her any less interesting, for I am delighted that you will go to her. This is ever so much more interesting than cooking-school."

"Permit me to differ," remarked Gilbert.

Katherine started off the next day, with the blessing of her approving sister, for her first lesson.

As she reached the foot of Marguerite's staircase, a young man, a black case in his hand, came running down the flight. He had a well-knit, well-carried figure, and his dark face was clean-shaven. His eyes, rather piercing in their bright gaze, shone with friendliness as he recognized Katherine.

"Why, Dr. McKnight," she said, as he lifted his hat. "Has it come to this!"

He was an old friend of Gilbert's, but his absence while getting his medical education had

sufficiently estranged him to make her shy of calling him "Jasper" in the old way. She had taken refuge in his title on the occasions of meeting him since his return to Montaigne. "I 'm told all the girls in town run here," she added, as she shook hands with him, "but I did n't suspect that the men had begun."

"That is good news," he answered. "I did n't know my lucky star had led me to select such a popular situation. What is the attraction?" The young man looked vaguely back up the passage-way.

"Hats. The prettiest hats in Montaigne. New York has none prettier, I am told."

"Good! The only trouble is, young ladies are so sure-footed. I 'm afraid none of you will ever roll down those stairs and require a physician."

"Has Dr. McKnight an office here?" Katherine looked surprised.

"Yes, my shingle will be out soon."

"I thought you were with Dr. Granbury, in North Montaigne."

"I am; but I am going to start an office here without giving up the other."

"Very well. I hope the milliner across the hall will be a mascot to you unconsciously."

"Thank you. That is a dubious wish for her customers," and laughingly the two parted.

Katherine ran upstairs to the room which a hum of voices assured her she should not to-day find empty. Entering, she saw a couple of ladies

in close conference with the gray-clad young woman, who bowed to her and indicated a chair. The slight gesture was made with the air of a hostess, and Katherine, seating herself, found entertainment in watching the milliner as she rearranged with artistic hand the bonnet which the elder of the women was trying on. The pair departed at last with gratified smiles, and Marguerite approached Kate.

"You have come to work?" she asked, with grave courtesy. "Kindly step this way."

The girl followed into the little room next the parlor, where was a litter of feathers, ribbon, velvet, wire, bonnet-frames, etc., among whose confusion Marguerite, herself looking like the high-priestess of order, seated herself, drawing forward a chair for Katherine at the same time.

For some reason, inexplicable to herself, the latter felt it to be an exciting experience to be closeted thus with her grave companion.

"This looks business-like, Mademoiselle," she said, as she removed her jacket.

"It is a busy time. You remembered your thimble," as Katherine drew one from her pocket. "That is usually forgotten. See, I have learned to keep a little box of them here."

"I am attached to my own thimble," returned Katherine, as she opened her bag, and drew forth the materials she had been directed to bring.

Her teacher set her a task to do, carefully explaining each step.

"How well you speak English," said Katherine, when she began to sew. She looked up as she spoke, and thought she again saw a suggestion of amusement in the firm lips.

"I am often told that," answered the milliner quietly.

She evidently did not welcome conversation, perhaps it was because she was so busy. Her hands flew deftly in and out the bonnet-frame she was covering with velvet. Kate could not refrain from casting frequent furtive glances at her companion's attractive face, since the downcast lids made it possible to do so, unobserved. It was a pure, cold countenance, which suited the severely simple gown, and Kate wondered if it never warmed into the life and gayety suited to its owner's youth; wondered whether the days of this woman, perhaps little older than herself, were all work and no play. Indeed, curiosity, but kindly curiosity, was the main sentiment in Miss Ormond's breast as she plied her needle. She finally spoke again: —

"I just met a friend at the foot of the stairs, a doctor, who says he has taken the room across from you, Mademoiselle."

"Indeed? The building is filling up. It is in a good situation." Silence again, and to Katherine a baffling silence. She would have liked to ask: Have you parents? Where do they live? Do you live in this flat, and if so, who lives here with you? and this would have been but the beginning of her catechism.

"That is a very pretty young girl you have to assist you. I saw her here the other day."

"Yes, Lucia is handsome. Make that turn just a little deeper, Miss Ormond."

Katherine obeyed.

"She is clever, too," went on Marguerite. "She has good judgment, and can assist the other girls in my absence."

"Do you go away?" Katherine looked up. Perhaps she was going to learn something.

"Only as far as this. It would not be pleasant for you, for instance, to spend this hour in the work-room."

"Oh, I see. You give lessons in this room. Do you really believe you can teach us your style, your knack, or whatever it is?"

The milliner bowed slightly without looking up. "That will have to be proved. I shall teach you all I can."

"I won't be frozen," thought Katherine.

"I am not sure," she answered aloud, "but that you will be like a woman we met in the country last summer, who made such delicious corn-bread that my mother begged her for her recipe. She was very obliging, and said she should be pleased to give it to her, so mother got out a paper and pencil, and the woman proceeded to explain that she took three or four handfuls of corn meal, sometimes more and sometimes less. Then she poured in milk, about the right quantity, and stirred it 'to a consistuency,' and she was going

on, but mother stopped her. She concluded that when she wanted that particular corn bread, only this woman could make it; and I suspect that when we want a Mademoiselle Marguerite hat we may have to come to you for it just the same, after all our labor. A great and subtle thing is knack."

The milliner glanced up at Katherine. Her manner was different from that of the pupils she had so far had to deal with.

"Was n't it a strange thing for you to offer to do, — an unusual thing?" pursued Katherine. "Supposing me to be wrong, and that you can impart your ability, are n't you killing the goose that lays the golden eggs?"

Marguerite gave her a smile which lit her face and made it mischievous.

"You see I do not quite kill my geese," she answered quietly. "As you just remarked, they may fly back to me occasionally. At worst, Montaigne is a large place," she continued, serious again. "When I have exhausted it, I can move on."

"I see you have thought it all out, Mademoiselle."

The milliner leaned forward, and taking Katherine's work from her hands, was showing her how to take the next step when the door of the showroom opened, a man's tread crossed the floor, and a masculine voice spoke Marguerite's name as a hand half drew aside the portière in the doorway.

"Excuse me," said the milliner hastily, and rising she hurried out to the adjoining room. Katherine heard a low murmur of conversation followed by a happy exclamation.

"Oh, Fritz!"

The tone was so intense, that involuntarily Miss Ormond looked up. The half-drawn portière revealed a part of a startling tableau. Marguerite's gray-clad figure was clasped in a man's arms. There was no mistake about that, although only a portion of each figure was visible. Katherine crimsoned to the tips of her ears, and lowered her eyes in extreme confusion.

Fortunately, more murmured conversation followed, which gave her cheeks time to cool, and by the time the man had taken his leave, and the milliner returned to the little room, Miss Ormond flattered herself that her appearance was calm and non-committal. After the subsiding of the first flush of vexation at having been compelled to witness the ardent embrace, her thoughts took a new turn. Here was an explanation of Mademoiselle's tactics which, considering her youth and attractiveness, might have occurred to Katherine before. Naturally, if she were going to be married, she would make hay while the sun shone. The geese would not be required to lay golden eggs long. The young woman's object was easy enough to comprehend now. She merely wished to make all the money she could in a short time. Her lover had brought her good news. The signs of it were

still obvious in the fair face which again leaned over Katherine's work. The latter looked with still greater curiosity and interest at the smooth, well-kept hair, and the high shell comb whose red-brown lights matched it in color.

The milliner did not appear to concern herself with a doubt as to how much or little of her recent interview had been intelligible to her pupil. Their relation was in her eyes evidently so entirely a business one, that Katherine's friendly nature was a little piqued, and she went home at last discreetly silent as to the details of her experiences, but laughingly announced at the dinner-table that her subjugation to the gray lady's wiles was deeper than before.

Mankind loves a lover even when she happens to be a humble, industrious milliner, working from sun to sun to earn her trousseau in addition to her daily bread; and Katherine, the next time she found herself sitting opposite her teacher in the little room, stole many a glance at the latter, studying her with "Fritz's" eyes. She had not caught a satisfactory glimpse of that individual, but he had a tall figure and a deep, pleasant voice, and Marguerite, whatever might be the quality of her nature, had a face which would grace any environment.

"I do hope she will be married in white," thought Miss Ormond, "and I wish I might put on her veil."

The milliner, looking up, was surprised at the

gaze she encountered in her pupil's eyes; and Katherine, recalled from her day-dream, went at her work again in considerable confusion. She began talking at random, but in such amiable fashion that it could not fail to make a friendly impression upon her companion.

The latter became drawn at last into general conversation; and at their third lesson she surprised Katherine. "Why do you call me Mademoiselle?" she asked. It was the first question she had ever put to her pupil, aside from business.

"Because every one does," answered the girl.

"Not to my face," said Marguerite, with the demure, amused look Miss Ormond had learned to recognize.

"What do they say, then?"

"'Marguerite,' usually."

Katherine shook her head, and her eyes twinkled. "I could n't think of being so disrespectful. I much prefer Mademoiselle."

"Yet I have no right to that title."

"Why not, since you are French?"

"Oh, but I 'm not French." The milliner's busy fingers worked away as she talked.

"But Marguerite" —

"Certainly. It is a French name, but one which Americans adopt quite frequently. I thought best to utilize that little bit of capital, since I happened to have it."

Katherine stopped working, and regarded her with interest.

"I see; but since it is all the name you give people to know you by" — She paused.

"Precisely."

"Then do you expect me to call you Marguerite?"

The milliner met Miss Ormond's friendly eyes with a look in which there was the dawn of friendliness. "You are different," she answered. "I believe it would not give you the same satisfaction it does most women."

"I suspected you were clever," said Katherine, forgetting her work and continuing to gaze, though her companion's fingers were flying again.

"I had to succeed," returned the latter sententiously.

Her pupil nodded. "So you suppressed half your name, for one thing; but you are going to tell it to me?"

"Certainly, if you wish. It is Laird."

"And Miss Laird knew it would be more attractive to be neither addressed nor dressed like other people," ventured Katherine.

A swift flush passed over the other's face.

"The dress is convenient," she answered, smiling, "but you are right."

CHAPTER IV.

KATHERINE'S MISSTEP.

"I THINK you need a chaperone during your visits to Marguerite," said Madeline to her sister one day soon after. "You are actually beginning to quote her. You are a dangerously sociable creature, Katherine. Please remember your mission there is to make hats, not friends."

"*You* please remember that I am hypnotized and not responsible," was the lofty response.

Katherine Ormond had the enviable quality of being interested in people. It was as impossible for her to be bored as it would be for a sparkling, bubbling spring to grow stagnant. Her interest in her new acquaintance grew with the days, although she learned nothing more definite about her than that she was Miss Laird, and had been working at millinery for three years. They grew to be quite talkative together on general topics, and Katherine sometimes prolonged her stay after her work had been put away.

One afternoon in especial she lingered until the street lamps were lighted in the early evening.

"I must go!" she exclaimed at last. "Why, it is dark already. Good-by," and hurrying out

the door, she started to run downstairs. She had descended perhaps a third of the way, when the heel of her boot caught on a step. She stumbled, and would have pitched headlong had there not been a rail which she grasped, and thus saved herself. She had turned her ankle severely, though, and the pain of it made her catch her lip between her teeth, while swiftly there recurred to her Jasper McKnight's mock regret at the sure-footedness of Marguerite's customers.

She tried to take another step, and the consequence was that just as a man turned in at the entrance and began to ascend toward her, Miss Ormond, with a stifled exclamation, ignominiously sat down on the stairs.

"Is anything the matter?" asked the newcomer, pausing when he reached her.

It was not Dr. McKnight, as for one moment she had hoped it might be, and yet the deep voice was one she had heard before.

"I have turned my ankle," she answered.

"Shall I get you a carriage?"

Katherine thought a moment. She was nearer the top than the bottom of the flight.

"If I could get back to the room at the head of the stairs — the milliner's," she said, "I could then send a message."

She feared to try to get to a carriage and go home alone.

"I am on my way there. Let me help you."

"It is Fritz!" thought Katherine, suddenly

remembering the voice with a sense of relief. Fritz as Miss Laird's betrothed was so frequently in her mind that he scarcely seemed a stranger.

"Thank you," she answered, putting her hand in the one he outstretched, and rising upon her unhurt foot.

Desperately she tried to make the other support her while she leaned on the man's arm to mount to the next step; but the attempt was a failure.

"I really can't," she said softly, a catch in her breath.

"There is n't the least need of your trying," said her companion, with a hearty kindliness of tone that was very reassuring; "if you will allow me" —

He did not finish the sentence, but lifting Katherine easily in his arms, moved quickly upstairs, and opening the milliner's door, walked in.

Marguerite was engaged in drawing the shades at the large front window, and as one stuck and refused to run easily, she spoke without turning her head: —

"Is that you, Fritz?"

"And it is I, too, Miss Laird," answered Katherine, so much alive to the absurdity of her position that she smiled, hiding her bright eyes in spite of the nagging pain in her foot.

Marguerite turned just as Katherine was being gently lowered upon the divan.

"Miss Ormond!" hurrying forward in extreme surprise. "What has happened?"

"I turned my ankle on your staircase."

"And my brother just happened to come up. How fortunate!"

Her brother! A flush overspread Katherine's face; but she postponed the disappointment.

"I don't know what I should have done, else. I might possibly have made you hear by shouting, but I should have been far more likely to bring the police. I thank you proportionately, Mr. Laird."

He stood looking down at her, approving her plucky manner, and noting the pallor into which her flush faded. He did not resemble his sister except in the dark auburn color of his hair and a certain concentrated expression of the eyes.

"There is a doctor across the hall whose office hour begins very soon," he said. "I think we had better get your shoe off and wait for him."

"No, no. I must go home," returned Katherine hastily. "Could you get hold of a messenger boy about here, Mr. Laird? I'm so sorry to trouble you."

"I am the best sort of a messenger boy myself," he said, his smile and speech both of a deliberate order. "That will be the quickest way."

Katherine demurred, but both brother and sister reassured her, so she scribbled a note to Gilbert, and Fritz set off with it, leaving with Marguerite a sharp pocket knife, by whose aid she began the removal of her guest's shoe.

"Lucia," she called, and the swarthy girl appeared.

"Bring another pillow, please, for Miss Ormond."

"I don't need it," protested Katherine, regarding the graceful woman kneeling by the divan and working with gentle, deft fingers over the swelling ankle.

But Lucia had obeyed, and at once brought the pillow, smiling as she received Miss Ormond's thanks.

She lingered a moment. "Everything is ready, miss," she said to her mistress.

"Very well; you may go then, Lucia. Have you your key to get in, in the morning? Good night. Don't forget that bundle for your mother."

When the girl had limped away, Katherine spoke.

"I am so sorry for this. I know I am keeping you and your brother from your dinner."

Marguerite shook her head brightly. "No, we have dinner at noon, he in Newark, and I here. Our supper comes at any time we are ready for it. Don't regret such a rarity for us as a little excitement. I am sorry for you, but you mustn't be sorry for us. Oh, I know how it hurts. I had a sprained ankle once myself," she added, with gentle sympathy, for Katherine winced as the shoe finally came off under her careful handling. "I think that is the doctor coming up now. Shall I not call him in?"

"No, I will wait until Gilbert — until my brother comes. I hope I shall not need a doctor.

How cozy this room becomes at night!" Katherine cast a glance around the parlor, in which its mistress had ingeniously concealed all signs of business.

"I am glad it seems so," returned Miss Laird. "Now I am going to give you a cup of tea. If only you were not suffering, how much I should enjoy entertaining you."

She set aside a tall screen in the corner of the room and drew forth a tea-table. "I hope you are one who appreciates this beverage."

"I do only too much," replied Katherine.

"That is good. My poor brother detests it, I am certain; but he drinks it every evening for sociability's sake, unless I am very indulgent and make coffee instead."

Miss Ormond, as she lay on the divan, an afghan thrown over her, enjoyed, in spite of the twinges in her foot, watching the movements of her hostess as the latter presided at the little table. She wondered what Madeline would say to the situation. There was no longer halo either of mystery or romance enshrining Marguerite the milliner. She was simply an energetic American girl, earning an income which prevented her from being dependent upon the brother with whom she lived in this flat; and yet, in spite of her humble and commonplace condition, the fact remained that she possessed for her present guest an attraction stronger than that of any girl of her own set.

At least Madeline would be obliged to commend the tea which Katherine tasted before the sound of wheels stopping before the house gave her hope that her brother had arrived.

In a moment the door opened, and a blonde, anxious face appeared. "Why, Katherine!" Gilbert strode forward, followed by Fritz, sedate and composed, as usual.

"Not too near;" his sister put forth a repressive hand. "I am afraid you will hit my foot. Miss Laird, let me introduce my brother, Mr. Ormond. Mr. Laird's acquaintance I suppose you made in the carriage. I mentioned his name in the note he was so very kind as to carry."

Katherine's manner was *empressée*. She feared Gilbert might not be sufficiently demonstrative; but he bowed low to Maguerite, and then turned toward her brother. "I have thanked Mr. Laird sincerely. We are greatly indebted. Now what is it, little girl? What have you done to yourself?" He stooped over his sister with concern.

"Only sprained my ankle. It swelled so that Miss Laird has taken my shoe off; and all I want of you is to carry me to the carriage and keep me from being hurt all the way home."

Gilbert met the rather pale smile with which the speaker regarded him.

"Yes; but McKnight is right across the hall here. Let us have him in to look at it first."

"No, indeed," answered Katherine quickly. "You might go and telephone to Dr. Granbury,

then he would be at our house nearly as soon as we are."

"But Dr. McKnight is right here."

"Don't bother me, Gilbert," with a coaxing lift of the eyebrows.

"That thing is hurting you like the dickens," was the decided rejoinder, as Ormond noticed the restless movement of his sister's head and the manner in which she bit her lip. "I 'll just go in and ask Jasper what the prospect would be of getting Dr. Granbury. Now be sensible, Kitty," he added in an undertone.

She seized his arm. "Would Mr. Laird ask" — she hesitated, looking up into Fritz's face as he stood waiting, "then Dr. McKnight need not know we are here. He is our friend, not our physician."

"Certainly, I understand," said Fritz, and turning away, he hastened on his errand.

"I am sorry we are responsible for spoiling your dinner, Miss Laird," said Gilbert, addressing their hostess, who still sat in her place by the pretty tea-table, making a picture which he thought would be less surprising on the stage than here in this flat on Main Street.

"I have just explained to your sister that we do not dine at this hour, and are not disturbed in our arrangements. Won't you sit down while you wait, Mr. Ormond?"

Katherine glanced at the speaker. This was the frigid, courteous woman whom she had first

known, and who kept her interlocutors at a distance.

"This is such good tea, Miss Laird," she said, draining the last drop.

Marguerite pressed her civilly to take a second cup, and Katherine, as she refused, wondered at the changed tone and manner extending even to her.

Fritz opened the door and entered.

"Dr. McKnight says that by this time Dr. Granbury is starting to assist in a consultation at Little Mountain," he announced.

"Then that settles it, Katherine. Let us have the thing bandaged and made as comfortable as may be. The motion of the carriage is going to hurt you at best." Ormond rose. "Thank you again, Mr. Laird," and without waiting for any objections from his sister, he disappeared from the room.

Fritz stood regarding Katherine with a clouded expression. "I am sorry you are obliged to have a fresh annoyance," he said.

"It is a small matter," she answered, smiling. "A doctor does n't inspire quite the same confidence when you have ridden in his goat wagon, that is all."

In a surprisingly short time Gilbert returned, relief depicted on his countenance. "McKnight will be here in five minutes," he announced.

"And now I am sure Miss Laird will be glad to have her supper," said Katherine, turning to her.

"Yes, we will go as soon as I have found out if I can do anything for the doctor."

Gilbert Ormond stood facing his host. "Each time I look at you, Mr. Laird, I am struck afresh by a resemblance to an acquaintance I had a good many years ago. He was a red-haired, round-faced chap, of the name of Sheldon; but the upper part of your face is so like that boy that each time I catch your eye it seems for an instant as if I were again looking at Tom Sheldon."

"So you are," was the brief answer.

"What?" Ormond's thin skin showed the surprised color beneath it.

The other continued quietly to return his gaze. He would not make an advance, but waited for his cue.

"Yet your name" — Gilbert hesitated.

"Miss Laird is my half-sister. Miss Ormond jumped at a conclusion." The speaker's face was still non-committal. Gilbert might make something of the old friendship, or he might drop it. Sheldon did not move a hair's breadth toward cordiality, but stood entirely at his ease.

Should Gilbert hesitate longer, his status at least with Tom's sister would have been different ever afterward, no matter what friendships later events might have called into existence; but he did not.

"You didn't remember me, then, Tom," he said, advancing with a frank smile and shaking hands heartily with Sheldon.

"Oh yes, I did. You have changed less than I, I fancy. I met you one day in September on the street in Newark, and knew you at once; but I saw that the recognition was not mutual." A gratified look had come into Sheldon's pleasant eyes.

Katherine meanwhile had forgotten aches and pains in her surprise and interest. She raised herself slightly as she listened to the interview.

"Do you remember me too, Mr. Sheldon?" she asked.

"Don't I remember Uncle Si's little Kittiwake?" he responded, turning slowly and smiling at her.

"Why, Miss Laird, did you know this?" Miss Ormond suddenly turned toward Marguerite. A flush had come into the latter's cheeks, as she sat motionless by her table."

"I knew my brother had met you at Pokonet."

"You call him Fritz?"

"His middle name is Frederic. I have always called him by it."

"Do you know Pokonet?"

"I was there a week in August."

"Why, yes," returned Katherine, with sudden remembrance. "The Hodgsons told me about you. They said you had snap."

Miss Laird smiled, and at that moment the doctor's knock was heard.

"Ah, Dr. McKnight," said Katherine, upon his entrance, "do you remember your speech about

sure-footed girls? You must have cast the evil eye on me that day. Let me introduce you to Miss Laird and her brother, Mr. Sheldon."

The young physician acknowledged his introductions and approached the patient.

"I apologize humbly, Miss Ormond. Let me see what compensation I can make at this late day."

"I will go to supper, Rita," said Fritz, and disappeared behind the portière.

Miss Laird stood by while the doctor made his examination of the swollen ankle, and waited upon him with a quickness of wit and foresight which won his admiration.

"I fear you have snapped something in there, Miss Ormond," he said at last.

"Dear me! I hope not," returned the unfortunate.

"What 's the use of telling her, Jasper?" said Gilbert, asking, in his impatience of his sister's evident pain, a very pertinent question; whose pertinence, however, it would require a rare physician to see.

This one replied: "Because she must be careful, and patient, and not try to use this foot too soon."

"Soon! Great Scott, the poor child does n't need any advice not to walk around on that cushion in a hurry."

"Stop calling my foot names," said Katherine.

"I think this will be best for you to wear

home," said Marguerite, offering a blue bedroom slipper which, when its soft crocheted wool was stretched over the bandages, made a spectacle that caused poor Katherine's eyes to disappear between her lashes, suffering though she was.

"Now then, my lady, the carriage waits," announced Gilbert.

"Do you need Fritz?" asked Miss Laird, and at the word her brother appeared from the adjoining room.

"We don't need Mr. Sheldon," said the doctor. "Mr. Ormond and I can make an armchair to the carriage."

"But can you go all the way, Dr. McKnight?" asked Fritz. "I suppose Mr. Ormond might like assistance at the other end of the route."

"Surely," said the doctor. At the same moment a door opened across the hall. "Some one is going into the office now, and my hour is not over."

"Then go right on, Jasper, since Sheldon is so kind. Don't let us detain you."

"Very well." Turning to Katherine, the doctor smiled. "I suppose you would like to see Dr. Granbury to-morrow. I will tell him. I hope you will pass a tolerably comfortable night, and I think you will."

Kate shook hands with him and thanked him.

"Now for an armchair, Sheldon," said Gilbert, offering his wrist.

The other looked down at him dubiously. The

difference in their height was not so noticeable until they stood close together thus, for both were well-proportioned.

"It will be a little one-sided," he suggested, as they made the seat. "If Miss Ormond would allow it, perhaps one of us could carry her down more comfortably."

"Certainly. I can do it as easily as turn my hand over," said Gilbert with alacrity. "Just open the door for me," and he turned toward Katherine, who protested with sudden vigor.

"No, no. Oh, I could n't let you, Gilbert. I am afraid of that long staircase."

"Come now, Katherine. I 'm not so big as Tom, but my muscle is all right."

"Give me the armchair, no matter how lopsided it is," said poor Katherine. "Indeed, the crookeder the more appropriate for this occasion."

"Then good night, Miss Laird." Gilbert turned to Marguerite. "Thank you very much for your hospitality."

In a minute more Katherine was seated on her perch.

"Our hats," said Tom. "I forgot them. Just put our hats on, will you, Rita?"

She laughed as she obeyed, receiving Mr. Ormond's grateful glance as she fixed his Derby on his head. Then she opened the door, and they squeezed carefully through it, the blue-clad foot aching in all its dimensions in the uncomfortable position.

"This is worse than riding on a camel at the World's Fair!" groaned Katherine. "Thank heaven for the cover of the darkness. Good night, Miss Laird. When shall I ever come up these stairs again!"

CHAPTER V.

FIRESIDE CONFIDENCES.

MRS. ORMOND and Madeline threw wide their door as a carriage stopped before the house.

"That man who came for Gilbert is coming back with them, I believe," said the former. "They have Katherine in an armchair. That poor child!"

"Good evening, friends," said the latter, as she was borne up the steps. "I would rather be picturesque than President. Move away, Madeline. My foot must have room to get into the house."

"How did you do it? What have you done?" exclaimed Mrs. Ormond.

"Where shall we take her?" asked Gilbert, pausing in the hall. "The circumstances are a little trying for an introduction, but my companion in misery here is Mr. Sheldon, mother; my sister, Mr. Sheldon. We will take a more convenient season for reminiscence, but I dare say you will both remember Mr. Hodgson's nephew at Pokonet." Fritz's grave countenance broke into an irrepressible smile as he bowed in his hampered position, and Madeline's fair face colored high in her surprise at the identity of her sister's bearer.

"Now then, which way?" continued Gilbert. "Is Katherine to go to her own room? I don't think we can squeeze up there in this shape."

"No, bring her to the pink room," said Mrs. Ormond. "If she is to be laid up with a sprain, it will be easier all around."

So through the parlor the cortège moved to the guest-chamber beyond, and once there the men deposited Katherine upon its divan, where she sank with a sigh of relief.

"I am glad your painful peregrinations are over, Miss Ormond," said Sheldon.

"I thank you for your help," she answered gratefully, putting out her hand. "I don't know what we should have done."

Her lips were pale, and Fritz saw it. He pressed her hand, murmured some hope for her recovery, and started precipitately to retreat.

"Pardon me, if I remain with my daughter, Mr. Sheldon. We are greatly indebted to you." Mrs. Ormond bowed to the young man with formal politeness, and turned back to the couch.

"You have been a friend in need, Sheldon," said Gilbert heartily, as they returned to the parlor. "It is an old trick of yours which you haven't forgotten yet. Won't you sit down?"

Fritz turned and glanced at Madeline, who had followed in a lingering and perfunctory manner, examining Sheldon meanwhile. There were no signs of the grimy workman about her old admirer.

His look seemed to force her to say something. "I am sure I should not have known you," she declared lightly. "How much a moustache alters a man's face!"

"Yes"—

"Why, come right out to dinner, Sheldon," interrupted Gilbert suddenly. "This fracas put it out of my head that we are as hollow as drums, both of us."

"Thank you, I can't. My sister will wait for me."

"Oh, in that case, of course. Well," as the guest moved into the hall, "good night, then. When your sister falls down those stairs, send for me, will you?" asked Gilbert, as he and Madeline followed.

Fritz gave the deliberate, good-humored smile that showed his strong white teeth. "I don't make much of carrying Rita about," he answered, and what in another's mouth might have sounded like a boast was in his modest deprecation. "Good night." He was gone with a bow and the same pleasant glance.

"It is a fact, too," said Gilbert admiringly, when the door had closed behind him. "He 's a splendidly built fellow. Why, what do you think! His sister is my beauty." Gilbert walked back toward the dining-room, his arm around Madeline.

"Your beauty?"

"Yes; that stunning stranger I have mentioned

to you. I have seen her occasionally on the street, and could n't find any one who knew who she was."

"Oh yes; I remember your enthusiasm over a tailor-made creature in black, with a perfect complexion; but I don't pay too much attention to your ravings. This evening's performances have mystified me completely. I must go to Katherine."

"No, mother is with her. I need you to look at while I am eating dinner. I suppose I am not to go dinnerless to bed, am I?"

"Poor boy, to be sure you must be fed."

Madeline seated him at table and rang for the maid.

"Now I will stay, provided you won't be mannish, but will tell me everything just as Katherine would. She was at the milliner's, was n't she? And I suppose she sprained her ankle on those stairs; then where in the world did she pick up Tom Sheldon?"

"She did n't. He picked her up in his manly arms and trotted upstairs with her. Otherwise she assures me she should be sitting on that staircase yet."

"But what was he doing there?"

"Going home to eat supper with my beauty."

"Oh, they live in that building."

Ormond finished his soup and accepted the more substantial course which the maid set before him.

"Why, certainly. My beauty is the splendid creature you profanely dub the milliner."

"*Marguerite!*" in large capitals.

Gilbert nodded. "Lovely Marguerite Laird!"

"Tom Sheldon's sister?" incredulously.

"His half-sister, yes."

"And you admire that Quakerish woman's looks?"

"Don't tell me you don't, Madeline, because I shall certainly believe you jealous."

"Me jealous? Jealous of a person like that!" The speaker's cheeks flushed and her eyes flashed. She did not deign to pursue the subject. "Well, Tom Sheldon being her brother is the strangest coincidence I have ever heard of," she added in a moment, thoughtfully. "Katherine's sprain was a blessing in disguise."

"Why?"

"Because she can't go there any more," rejoined Madeline briefly. "I wish I had n't urged her to it in the first place. If I had taken the lessons instead, no harm would be done. Why, she has actually struck up a friendship with Marguerite."

"Then it is just because it is Katherine," returned Gilbert. "She can find her way into any heart. From what I saw of Tom's sister I should judge she would be as effective a refrigerator as she is milliner."

But Gilbert's view of Marguerite Laird had been very limited. At least, if he could have

observed her an hour later, as she sat by her brother in their little parlor, he would have given a different description of her.

Fritz, having finished his supper, sat in an armchair before the fire, and his sister, beside him on a lower seat, leaned her head against its arm.

"It was to be," she said, smiling dreamily at the coals. "I thought it might be that we should live here all winter, and they would never find you out."

"It won't make any difference," he answered.

"No, I suppose not."

"I wish it might for your sake, Rita. Your life is very dull."

"I beg your pardon, sir; my life will never be dull so long as you come home to me every evening. When you like some other man's sister better, it will be time for me to look gloomily into the coals in solitary state; but I sha'n't be dull even then, Fritz;" she reached up her hand and gave his a brief squeeze; "so like her just as soon as you wish to. My life is n't dull, my dear;" she smiled reminiscently as she spoke. "Sometimes I think I live in the midst of a comedy all the time. I must n't betray the secrets of the prison-house, but I assure you my trade is one which unveils a woman's pet vanities, little tempers, and lack of integrity if she has any, and on the other hand exhibits a heroine in the highest light. One fact has been impressed on me with almost piteous

intensity. It is the longing all women have to be beautiful."

Fritz looked down on his sister's thick hair. "You don't seem to make friends, Rita, not in the way I hoped."

She shook her head gayly. "I told you I must choose between that and a living, and I chose the living. If I had stayed at home in Michigan, I could have kept a shop and been in society, too. Had I been a society girl here in Montaigne and met with reverses, I could have made hats for my friends and not lost caste with the best of them; but I came here a stranger, and you had n't yet anything to depend upon except a head full of first-class, hard-worked brains, and I determined not to be too modest;" she laughed gleefully; "even to be theatrical if I chose" —

"I don't like your name like that on the window. I never did."

"Fritz, my child, it caught twenty, where 'Miss Laird' would have caught one. The upper ten began to come. They saw my hats and were conquered. They like me. They call me 'Marguerite' as they would address a maid or a celebrity, and are happy. Sometimes an old lady says 'my dear,' and I like it; but I treat them all alike. They find they cannot get on my side of the barrier, and that I do not want to get on theirs. Oh, I am as wise as a serpent, but as harmless as a dove; and I *can* make hats." She rose from her low seat with quick, flexible grace,

and disappeared. In another minute she stood before Fritz, an evening bonnet of turquoise velvet and airy jet upon her head.

"There!"

He looked up, with growing admiration in eyes and smile.

"You look handsome, Rita. Is it that velvet business?"

"Not a bad compliment from a slow-boots like you." She resumed her seat, the bonnet still on her head. "Look at it. Of course you 've heard of a love of a bonnet. Well, this is a bright, particular love. No, don't touch it."

Sheldon dropped the hand he had raised. "I was just going to turn down those shiny spikes a little," he said meekly. "They 're pretty high."

"Profane man! Know that if they were a fourth of an inch lower, my name could not go out with the bonnet. Understand that this is perfect. Miss Ormond wants to copy it in pale green for her sister."

Marguerite rested her elbow on her knee, and, supporting her chin on her hand, looked back into the fire.

"I never knew, Fritz, why you warned me not to mention you to the Ormonds. You said they were fashionable people, and I suspected from your manner that you hoped I should not meet them at all."

"No, not exactly that," answered her brother slowly. "I did not care to make any capital out

of a by-gone acquaintance formed under those circumstances; in fact, I had burned my fingers already, and had a proper respect for the fire."

"Tell me about it."

"Fingers are allegorical in this instance. It was a more romantic portion of my anatomy that was singed."

Marguerite looked startled. "Did she affect not to know you then to-night? Can she be such a hypocrite? And I liked her so much! I thought her so different from the others."

"No, no. It was n't your Miss Ormond. It was the other one."

Marguerite was silent a minute. "She is very pretty," she said at last.

"Yes, but

> 'If she be not fair for me,
> What care I how fair she be.'"

The old couplet was spoken so cheerfully that Marguerite looked up hopefully.

"How long ago, Fritz?"

"Two years."

"Did she treat you well?"

Sheldon smiled. "I should have to look through a woman's eyes to be able to answer that fairly."

"Look through mine."

A low laugh broke from Fritz as he regarded the orbs that were offered him. They were shining with such stern partisanship that he saw Madeline arraigned, tried, and judged.

"They are strictly impartial ones, I suppose," he said.

Marguerite drew a deep sigh of relief. "Your eyes and your laugh relieve me more than an hour's talking, my dear. You are entirely over it."

"Yes, Rita," he answered seriously, "but the experience bit deep. The scar is there. I am inoculated against love. Safe to wander amidst all the rosebud gardens of girls in existence. You will never be left to gaze into the coals alone."

Marguerite leaned her cheek against his shoulder. "Then some woman will lose the dearest and best husband that could be created."

They were silent a minute. Silences frequently fell between them in their companionship, such was the completeness of their mutual understanding.

"We are greatly blessed," she added at last. "I really believe the happiest moment of my life was when you came home the other day to tell me you had that position in the McKnight works. I went back to Miss Ormond, who was in the next room, and I could scarcely keep from telling her. She has such sympathetic eyes. The first time I saw her, she attracted me."

"She has a nice face, has n't she? The only time I saw her at Pokonet, I was too shy and homesick to say half a dozen words to her. She was a busy little creature, skipping around with

Uncle Silas, and asking thirty questions to the minute." Sheldon paused, and became thoughtful again.

At last he asked: "How should you like to go out of business, Rita?"

His sister smiled musingly. "Castle-building?"

"No; in earnest. Shut up shop, wear all the bonnets yourself, and become a private individual."

The girl laughed. "Instead of the great and only Marguerite!" A ruminative frown puckered her white forehead. "I might consider it," she replied seriously, "but there is a red bonnet in stock that would n't become me. Indeed, there are several that I should consider much too gay. You know I like to wear black in the street. I shall not be able to entertain your proposition, Mr. Sheldon, until they are all sold."

"I think we 're safe enough now, Rita."

"Listen to the biggity way the man talks, all on account of that McKnight position!"

"You might be placed in a pleasanter social position by the means."

"Is a retired milliner more respectable than an active one?"

"We might try and see," suggested Fritz.

"I have n't missed anything yet," said his sister. "I have been interested in making a business success, and in helping Lucia and her family. Then in the evening there are the quiet chats or jolly larks with you. Is n't my life full?"

"I believe you are a contented human being," he answered, regarding the frank face under the fine hat which she had totally forgotten. "They are not common."

"Then let well enough alone," she returned. "No wonder I am content," she continued after a while. "You know how I longed to come to you during those years of our separation, and how I feared I might be a drag upon you, so you can see how satisfying is the present safe condition of things. You are where there is a chance to rise, and we can pay our bills as it is. What remains to wish for?"

"I 'm a lucky fellow," said Fritz.

CHAPTER VI.

A PROFESSIONAL VISIT.

"DR. GRANBURY begs you to accept me in his place this afternoon," said Jasper McKnight, presenting himself beside Miss Ormond's couch a few days afterward.

Madeline had ushered him into the room, and now stood by.

"Tell the truth, Dr. McKnight," she said warningly. "Did n't Dr. Granbury say: 'Jasper, you go and see Kitty Ormond's foot to-day. I 'm too busy!'"

The young physician laughed. "Were you behind the door all that time, Miss Madeline? It was n't fair. You ought to have made yourself known."

He drew up a chair beside the invalid.

"How goes it, Miss Katherine?"

The girl smiled slightly. "It does n't go, much."

"It is a slow trouble, is n't it? but I see you find means to be industrious in spite of your imprisonment."

"Industrious!" Mrs. Ormond repeated the word she had caught as she entered the room.

"How do you do, Jasper?" greeting the young man, who rose to take her cordially offered hand. Mrs. Ormond was not the only mother in her circle who smiled upon Dr. McKnight. "I wish you would tell Katherine not to be so indefatigable. Perhaps your edict will have more weight than mine; but I give you warning that the habit of a lifetime, even of a short lifetime, cannot be easily overcome. The child must always be doing something."

Katherine lifted her eyebrows. "It is not quite clear to me whether I am being scolded or flattered," she remarked, brushing aside some scraps of ribbon and velvet.

It was clear to Madeline, however, and a cloud of displeasure gathered on her fair brow as her mother proceeded.

"And do for pity's sake put something on that ankle to-day that is going to hurry it up," proceeded Mrs. Ormond. "You behold in me a most abused individual. I actually have to keep my own house and order my own servants and meals; and that is work that I have been so free from ever since Katherine left school, that I am spoiled. I have filled my time up with different things."

"You see mother quite ignores the fact that she has another daughter," said Madeline. "I should have been the one to have the sprained ankle."

"My dear, your gifts, like my own, lie in other directions," said Mrs. Ormond, noting her pretty

child's vexation and hastening to attempt to appease her. "We don't pretend to be born with such domestic inclinations as Katherine's."

This well-meant effort was not entirely successful. Madeline found herself in a secondary position, a sort of novelty which failed to charm her.

She leaned her elbow on the head of her sister's divan. "I think the youngest child is always at a disadvantage," she said pensively, and the doctor, lifting his eyes from his bandaging, found her a graceful and attractive sight. "No one knows what serious things we can do, and no one cares."

"On the contrary, Miss Madeline," said Jasper, "your friends have unbounded faith in your latent possibilities, and as for not caring" — An eloquent look finished the sentence. A flourishing ball-room flirtation had already begun between the young physician and the beauty of the Ormond family, so he found the labor-saving device of a glance in place of a phrase serve his turn very well, even here by daylight.

He then directed a different but still unprofessional gaze at Katherine and the mysterious airy trifles which surrounded her. "Might a humble individual inquire what in the world you are doing?" he asked.

"Making a hat. Don't you think it is going to be pretty?" and Katherine's eyes narrowed and twinkled as she put the uncovered skeleton on her head and regarded the young man. The effect

was grotesque, and Madeline would have endured torture before she would have thus exhibited herself.

"Now don't hurt me by saying you don't like it," pursued Miss Ormond feelingly, regarding the doctor, her head on one side.

"It is rather airy for our climate. I should prefer a Derby for myself; but I suppose it is n't finished yet."

"Oh, I shall add one or two little touches."

"I thought no one in Montaigne ventured to make hats now except my illustrious neighbor Marguerite."

"Oh, but she is dividing her mantle among the girls, and a little corner of it has fallen on me."

"Another accomplishment." Dr. McKnight's dark eyes had the ability to express deferential admiration of women at a moment's notice, and they rested on Katherine now with a wondering look which she laughed at openly.

"I have none," she answered. "No weaknesses of any kind, not even accomplishments. Millinery is a serious occupation."

"Indeed it is," added Madeline. An idea had popped into her head. "Wait a minute," she said, and glided from the room.

Mrs. Ormond, who had seated herself near a window with some needlework, laughed indulgently. "What idea has that madcap taken into her head now?" she said. "Really, Jasper, I

could almost believe that time has rolled back, and that you are coming in to play with the children in the old way."

"He and Gilbert did n't condescend to play with us much, I recollect," remarked Katherine.

The young man smiled. "I remember being at a seashore place with you once for a few days as Gilbert's guest, and that you outswam me, Miss Katherine. The stinging mortification of that moment comes back to me even now, and makes my ears tingle."

"That was Pokonet," said the girl joyously. "I had quite forgotten that you knew Pokonet, Dr. McKnight."

"Up you go in Katherine's estimation," remarked Mrs. Ormond with gentle sarcasm. "Pokonet is her shibboleth. Learn to talk about it glibly, and ransack your memory for events there, and she will consider you a most interesting personage."

"Then I certainly shall" — the doctor was saying, when Madeline, in all her pliant, conscious grace, swept back into the room.

Around her shoulders was a winter wrap with fluffy feathery decorations, from which her golden head rose, crowned with a picturesque hat nodding its plumes above a wavy brim.

She dropped an exaggerated courtesy, rising with flushed, smiling face.

"This is a private view, Dr. McKnight," she announced with a bewitching pose. "Katherine

is too modest, showing the framework of what is to be. Now I ask you, can't she make a hat?"

Mrs. Ormond laughed, to cover her admiration of her pet, and the physician started to his feet.

"I wish I were a photographer," he said.

"Oh, don't flatter *me*. It is Katherine," said the young girl, exultantly conscious of the tendril-like effects of her blonde hair, and the fearlessness with which her rose-leaf skin could welcome the sunlight which was pouring into the room.

But Dr. McKnight was not so obtuse as to turn his attention to Katherine at this moment. He addressed Mrs. Ormond: "You should have Miss Madeline's portrait painted in that costume," he said.

"Do you think so?" asked the mother indifferently.

"You see," said Madeline, taking her old seat by the divan and slipping back the richly lined wrap, "Katherine was very considerate in the date which she chose to cripple herself. She had taken all the lessons of Marguerite except one or two, had n't you, Katherine?"

"All except one," answered the other. "I wish she would come and see me."

"You mean for the purpose of giving you the last lesson, my dear?" said Mrs. Ormond, with a certain gentle sonorousness which her daughter accepted as a warning. Do you think it would n't tire you too much?"

Katherine's eyes sought the doctor's with an expression which surprised and puzzled him. Unconsciously, Mrs. Ormond gave him the clue.

"It appears that that young woman Marguerite is a quite intelligent person," she said. "My daughter takes an interest in her. Moreover, it seems that she is related to some very honest people down in the country, at this very Pokonet we were speaking of a moment ago, who kept the farmhouse the children found such a paradise."

"I met Miss Laird in the hallway yesterday," said Dr. McKnight, addressing his patient. "She inquired for you."

Katherine's expressive eyes brightened.

"Of course, if you have any message to send her, it would be the easiest thing in the world for me to deliver it."

"No, no," interposed Mrs. Ormond hastily. "Katherine would not think of imposing upon you a task which would take you so far out of your orbit. We will find other means to send a message."

Katherine said nothing, and the lids fell over her clear, tell-tale eyes.

"I met your aunt a few days ago," pursued Mrs. Ormond. "She told me you were growing quite busy. I congratulate you."

"It is a little early for congratulation, I assure you," returned the young man. "I must have a few gray hairs before I can inspire much confidence."

"And by that time you won't be so desirable at the Assemblies," said Madeline, with a charmingly insolent glance. "Just now we don't want you to inspire so much confidence that you will be professionally engaged during the evening."

Dr. McKnight laughed and shook his head. "I 'm afraid I shall be able to lead many a German with you yet, Miss Madeline."

The girl lifted her chin in mock indignation. "Afraid! Upon my word, Dr. McKnight! I shall know what to do with your next invitation."

Katherine smiled faintly upon the physician as he was leaving. "Tell the Wise Woman she has neglected me longer than usual," she said.

The doctor looked at her curiously. "What wonderful bit of wisdom was it which earned Aunt Edna such a flattering title?"

"No one thing. Before I was through with my fairy-tale days I had formed the habit of carrying perplexities to her, and I became struck with the resemblance of the situation to that of my favorite heroines, each one of whom was sure to know where was a Wise Woman who found the way out of every dilemma in the most wonderful manner."

"Usually old hags, were n't they?"

"Yes; and my Wise Woman proves the wonders of evolution. Ask her to come soon."

The next time Madeline Ormond was alone with her mother, she gave vent to her displeasure.

"I do wish," she said, "that you would n't take

pains to imply to people that I am nothing but a lily of the field."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Ormond.

Her daughter's cheeks were flushed. "Even if you would like to make a match between Katherine and Dr. McKnight, you need n't do it at my expense."

"My dear, you shock me. When either of you girls decides to leave me, I shall be heart-broken. Pray don't suggest my hastening the catastrophe."

"If we never did leave you, you would be heart-broken, and you know it, mother mine," retorted Madeline ruthlessly; "but I object on general principles to having people told that I am of no consequence in the house."

"There is no danger of my ever giving such an untrue impression, my love. I had n't the most remote intention of hurting your feelings. Surely you know that the characteristics I was referring to in Katherine are not those Jasper McKnight would particularly look for in a wife. What does he need to care for the domestic and thrifty virtues? What he wants is a handsome woman to be the head of his establishment and spend his money with good taste and judgment."

Madeline looked thoughtful. "I wonder if that woman will have to be under Aunt Edna's sharp eyes all the time. I shall not envy her if she is."

"My dear," said Mrs. Ormond, with dignified remonstrance, "Miss McKnight surely merits Katherine's name for her sufficiently to withdraw

gracefully when her nephew's wife comes home. She is no dependent, and we will give her credit for a sense of propriety."

"I am not sure that she likes me," said Madeline, regarding her mother interrogatively.

"Nonsense, child. Of course she has more to say to your sister because Katherine is fondest of her; but she has known all my children from their babyhood, and naturally she takes an interest in you all; beside," Mrs. Ormond cast a furtive glance at her daughter's thoughtful face, "I do not know that it is of very great importance whether she likes you or not. I am certain that Jasper McKnight has a mind of his own. Look at his chin."

"Thank you. I know his chin well enough," laughed Madeline, restored to good nature. "You need n't try to marry me to him any more than Katherine, mamma dear."

"I beg you won't make such remarks," said Mrs. Ormond coldly; "I don't urge you to marry, but I do emphatically urge you to refrain from marrying a man whom I could not approve as I do of Jasper. I knew him in knickerbockers, and I know the blood, and the family traits, and" — Mrs. Ormond was going to say position, but she substituted "and all." She sighed heavily. "Every mother of attractive girls has my sympathy. They are an incessant care!"

"And comfort," added Madeline, caressing her offended parent. "What possessed Jasper to be

a doctor?" she continued discontentedly. "I think physicians' wives must be continually annoyed, never being certain that their husbands can go with them anywhere. He did n't need to earn his living, and some less laborious profession would have answered just as well."

She made somewhat the same comment to her sister later in the day.

"What is it to you how laborious a profession Dr. McKnight has chosen?" asked Katherine, regarding the speaker quizzically. "Are you taking a sisterly interest in Jasper? Don't do it, Madeline. You know if you do, I shall have him on my hands shortly."

Madeline showed her pearly teeth in a little gratified smile. The sisters were the best of friends, for Katherine's honest and ungrudging admission of her sister's fascinations was sweet daily food to the younger.

"I suppose some time I shall have to take a serious interest in somebody," said Madeline, with a bored air.

Katherine smiled. "When Prince Charming stops his white charger under your window and winds his mellow horn, there won't be much 'have to' about it, I fancy."

The younger sister shrugged her shoulders. "No, I thank you. No 'whistle and I 'll come to ye, my lad,' for me."

"Indeed? So the prince must throw his reins to the groom and come clanking into my lady's

parlor. Can you fancy him carrying a bag containing bandages and liniment?"

"It was very stupid of him to choose that profession," returned Madeline, not joining in her sister's laugh, but, on the contrary, allowing a decided cloud to gather on her face.

Katherine grew serious. "You don't know the first tiny, tiny grain about what love is, you little girl," she said, after a grave instant.

"Indeed!" retorted her sister; "and are you so well informed?"

"I?" in extreme surprise. "No, indeed, I know nothing of it; and," added Katherine, speaking lower, "sometimes I am afraid I never shall."

"Why afraid?"

"Why? Why, because it must be so beautiful!"

Madeline laughed aloud at her awestruck tone. "You sly-boots. I saw the glance Ed Arnold bestowed upon you with his third favor at the last German."

Katherine did not smile; neither did she look offended, but thoughtful. "The Wise Woman says it is wrong even for us to tease one another about young men," she said.

"Oh, the idea!" exclaimed Madeline.

"She thinks it a great misfortune for a girl not to be able to prevent a proposal of marriage that she cannot accept."

Madeline laughed aloud. "Sour grapes! Would n't you know an old maid got that off?"

Katherine's face flushed throughout its whiteness. In her single-hearted admiration of her pretty sister, she seldom had been so indignant with her.

"Can you think of a man fit to be the Wise Woman's husband?" she asked, after a hesitation during which she performed some mental act equivalent to counting ten.

"I never thought about it," said Madeline carelessly.

"Surely you are above the ignorant vulgarity of deciding that, because a middle-aged woman is unmarried, it is because she has n't had the opportunity to be otherwise?"

"Nice, soft little Kitties should n't get excited," laughed Madeline. "Pardon me, if I stepped on your tenderest sensibility. It was through ignorance, I assure you. I knew old maids were the only persons truly inspired in the matter of bringing up children; but I had n't yet learned that they were authority on love affairs."

"I suppose there is nothing bad in itself about the term 'old maid,'" said Katherine reflectively; "but think of the Wise Woman, with her noble white head, and her beautiful unconscious stateliness, and it shows how ungracious the words have become that they no more fit her than a mean gown would."

"In other words, your little sister had better obey the signs and keep off the grass, if she wants fetching hats and other favors done for her," remarked Madeline jocosely.

"Not that," said Katherine quietly, going back to the work she had dropped; "but I wonder, if the Wise Woman should gather together all the girl friends we have in Montaigne, and would take the trouble to talk to them as she has to me, whether the larger portion of them would not accept her words as true and be the better for them."

"Oh, smile a little, Kitty, even on poor, degenerate me." Madeline leaned forward and chucked her sister under the chin.

Katherine's eyes suddenly lifted, and she delivered a searching glance into the blue ones so near. "I don't think you have always been able to help it when men have been humiliated by your refusal; but you called Lawton Gates 'poor fool' in speaking of him afterward. I never forgot that."

"He was as poor as he could decently be, and a poverty-stricken man is always a fool to offer himself to a girl. Let him 'flax around,' as Mr. Hodgson used to say, and get some money before he talks about such things."

"And you encouraged Tom Sheldon," continued Katherine accusingly.

Madeline looked reflective as she leaned her chin on her clasped hands. "Would n't he be stunning, if he could fall heir to a fortune and get him some antecedents?"

"Humph!" exclaimed Katherine. "Go to" —

"I won't."

"Go to the cemetery" —

"Thanks awfully."

"At Pokonet, and see whether Mr. Sheldon is in need of antecedents. There they lie, all the way back to the seventeenth century. Can you show as many?"

"My ancestors may be few, but they are more grammatical than his. Do you remember 'Deacon Smith,' who departed this life in 1690?"

> 'Smith is no more. His soul has took its flight
> From sin and darkness to celestial light.
> Weep reader, weep, but not for him the sigh,
> For you, yourself, like him, the same, must die!'"

Katherine nodded. "How often I have wished I might conjure up the figures of the men and women who used to walk about the Pokonet roads in those by-gone days. I think Miss Laird must resemble some village beauty whose delicate features singled her out from her companions, some pretty, great-great-grandmother, who left the pattern of her nose as a precious heirloom to be passed down to posterity."

"If it were n't for Marguerite" — began Madeline thoughtfully, and paused.

"What were you going to say?"

"Oh, nothing. I was only thinking that Tom Sheldon is a very presentable sort of man," returned Madeline.

Katherine glanced at her. Ever since her flying trip to Pokonet, it had seemed to her that she and Madeline were less at one than of old. It was an unpleasant thought, and she always thrust it away when it claimed admission.

CHAPTER VII.

MILLINER AND MEDICO.

"You can wear almost any color you like, madam," said Marguerite. "Probably you can scarcely understand what a relief it is to my mind when a customer like yourself enters my room."

The lady addressed smiled, and looked curiously at the milliner.

"Yes; I am something of an enthusiast in my work, and it is a positive pain to me when a customer insists upon a tint unsuited to her. I assure you I am obliged to expend much tact and diplomacy upon some in order to get my way, and even then am not always able to avert the catastrophe."

"Dear me," said the elder woman, looking amusedly into the speaking eyes.

"When a person like yourself comes into the room I say to myself: 'She will repay me by her appearance for my trouble, and there will be no contention.' Nature imparts a delicacy to the skin to match the hair as it turns white, and consequently there is a gracious welcoming of all colors, which takes away the fear of discord, if ordinary precaution is observed."

"Bless me, child," laughed the other. "I don't wonder at your success, if you make people in love with old age."

"You are in the youth of old age, madam; but every age has its attractions, if only health accompanies it."

The customer looked about her. "I have been told a good deal about this little establishment of yours, and, happening to be in the neighborhood, I thought I would look in; but I don't really need a bonnet just now."

"Come again when you do." Marguerite gave her fleeting bright smile.

"I hear it contradicted that you are French;" the lady's searching dark eyes looked back at her.

"I have confided that fact to but one customer. I felt certain she would n't betray me." The speaker did not look anxious.

"It was your grocer down here who was my informant. I was in there just now, and he referred to 'that there French milliner up street that ain't no more French 'n you be.'"

Marguerite laughed. "I think I can go on my own merits now."

"It looks so. Well," with a faint sigh, "I believe you will have to make me a bonnet. Either my vanity that you have flattered so adroitly, or else my conscience, suggests that I ought to have something a little dressy to wear in the evening."

"Will you leave it to me entirely?" There was

a strain of childlike enthusiasm in the milliner's tone.

"I don't know. I'm a little afraid of you. Your hints sounded as if you thought a rainbow would be a rather becoming bonnet for me. Remember now, I have clung to gray and black for ten years."

Marguerite smiled. "I can almost see it now," she said. "Gray velvet, chiffon, steel, and a touch of red."

"Oh, I suppose it is heresy to doubt you," returned the other, with a shrug. "After all, you are Marguerite."

"Then let me take off your bonnet, and we will see about the frame."

A short time afterward, the door of the doctor's office across the hall rang its little bell, and Marguerite's customer entered Dr. McKnight's reception-room.

"You have n't gone," she said, as Jasper emerged from an inner door.

"No; there are a few minutes' grace yet;" the doctor kissed his guest.

"You are very nice here," she said, looking about critically. "Those hangings are an improvement. It is really cozy with the table and easy-chairs and books."

"Yes," he answered, smiling, as he seated his aunt and threw himself in a negligent attitude on a divan, "a pleasant spot in which to spend a solitary hour or so each day."

"Nonsense," she returned brightly. "You won't be solitary long. You were always a fortunate boy."

"I don't know, aunt Edna. I am reminded of the fisherman who sets out with the latest wrinkle in basket and fancy rod and tackle, and watches his unmolested line all day, while the boy a few feet away, with a string and a bent pin, is industriously pulling in fish."

Miss McKnight smiled. "It is a good place for fish, certainly. There is a girl across the hall catching them fast enough. She uses a needle and thread instead of a pin and string, but she takes them. I am the latest victim. I think her bait must be her specialty."

"Her looks, you mean? I 'm afraid I can't compete with her there."

"No, no. She is clever."

"And do you mean, you unnatural aunt" —

"No; I have plenty of faith in your cleverness; but one phase of it is patience, remember."

"Patients are just what I lack."

Miss McKnight raised her daintily gloved hand. "I would rather believe you ungrammatical than guilty of an antique pun. I have been to see one of your patients to-day."

"Who?"

"Katherine Ormond."

"She is not mine. She is Dr. Granbury's. She has n't a particle of confidence in me."

"They are extremely friendly to you, from Mrs. Ormond down."

"Yes, but that is different. Is Katherine still making hats for her sister?"

"No; I found her reading to-day."

"I am glad you went. She said you had neglected her."

"Dear little girl. I never mean to. She was reading to Madeline."

"They seem devoted to each other," remarked Jasper. "It is pretty to see two sisters such friends."

Miss McKnight nodded slowly. "It requires a Katherine to fit into the requirements of a Madeline."

"Katherine is your favorite, is n't she?" asked the doctor curiously.

"Katherine Ormond is a girl who has begun the good fight," answered his aunt.

"Why, she seems to me quite as frivolous as the other one."

"I did not intend to say that either of them was frivolous. I have seen them grow up, and Katherine took an especial hold upon my sympathies when, after she had been in society a year or so, Madeline came forward and eclipsed her. It was a serious and not an easy lesson for her to learn to rejoice in Madeline's triumphs; to have a younger, prettier sister divert attention from one's self, and learn to be glad of her success, is a triumph; and little Katherine attained it." Miss McKnight's expression grew very sweet, as she forgot Jasper and allowed her thoughts to conjure up some inward picture.

Her nephew's voice broke the spell. "Madeline Ormond *is* a pretty girl," he said heartily.

"Yes, indeed she is," responded the other. "I hope some time her sweetness will go all the way in."

"Come now, aunt Edna, you expect too much of young people."

"No, I don't think so. I believe in them. Madeline's prettiness is a handicap to her; but there will come a day when she will waken to the fact that she has a soul, and some things that are inverted now will come right side up."

"She 'll do as she is for common folks of my gender," remarked Jasper lightly.

His aunt looked at him with a lenient, affectionate expression that was familiar. "Yes, poor dear," she answered.

"Who is the poor dear?" he demanded. "Madeline Ormond or myself?" Then as his aunt only smiled and looked away, he drew nearer and took her gloved hand in his. "Tell me instantly whom you are compassionating."

"I pity all creatures who are like young bears and have all their troubles before them," she returned.

"Are you aware, madam, that you are patronizing a full-blown M. D.?"

Miss McKnight regarded her nephew meditatively. "Tell me, Jasper," she said at last, "are you going to be a wise doctor? Oh, I dare say you will be a *wise* doctor, but are you going to be a wise *doctor?*"

"Is this some more spook business? Finding souls and things?"

"Yes; I hope you will find your own and other people's, else you won't be likely to do much good; but that is n't the point I was thinking of just now. I have n't always been strong and well as I am at present, as you know, and my experience with doctors has been varied; but the sum of it was that I wanted to make one to order."

"Ah ha!" Jasper lifted his eyebrows and looked enlightened. "The true inwardness of your actions is coming out. You influenced a defenseless orphan in a manner to further your own schemes. Very well. What next?"

"Next I want to give you one or two rules which, if you are to be the totally original and ideal physician, you are never to forget."

"Go on, Wise Woman."

"First, be your patient rich or poor, young or old, pretty or ugly, male or female, remember that that patient is a human being with a soul" —

"I knew there was a spook in the fence."

"An individual with feelings, hopes, and fears, especially fears, and not merely a case. One would suppose that the very fact that a person goes to a doctor argues a condition of mind and body which requires all the hope and cheer to be suggested that the facts will permit. Instead of this, physicians, the best of those whom I have known, will allow themselves to commit one or all of the following stupid iniquities." Miss Mc-

Knight checked off her accusations on her fingers. "Where the patient is ill enough to be in bed, I admit that a doctor is more guarded. It is in his office that there is most thoughtless unkindness. Occasionally the physician thinks aloud, stating unfavorable symptoms of the patient's condition; a proceeding always harmful, and inexcusable unless death is imminent. This is sometimes done from carelessness, and sometimes for the purpose of exhibiting knowledge. Secondly, he relates grewsome tales of the experience of other patients suffering from maladies similar to the one under treatment, dwelling upon facts interesting to himself from a scientific point of view, and simply heart-sickening to his unfortunate listener. The patient has come to his office to be helped up out of some slough. It would be presumable that the physician, of all people in the world, would realize that the troubled mind must be lifted from a dreary view of disease, yet this physician is frequently the very one to fill this depressed mind with new and worse pictures of ill while he deals out his remedy. Probably nowhere in the world has there been more heroically polite self-repression than in doctors' offices. A person is ordinarily much attached to his physician. He will listen to much that weighs him down rather than snub this kind and useful friend. Take, for instance, one of my own experiences. I was suffering from insomnia, and was very nervous. During one of my visits to the doctor,

another physician came in, to whom mine described my case. The visitor immediately began to cite in detail a case of insomnia under his own care. He put into my mind symptoms that I had never thought of. I shall never forget the crucifixion of listening to his recital, while my own physician was wrapped in interest. The shrieks of the agonized creature he described ring in my ears to-day. Now that I am strong I could bear such a story, if necessary; but at that time would you not suppose that the mere fact that I was in that office for treatment would have made those doctors as quickly offer me pure arsenic as that recital?"

"You have been unfortunate in your physicians," said Jasper.

"Perhaps, my dear, but in a long life I have employed many. The cloven foot has always shown in a greater or less degree. The mistakes that arise from forgetting the individual in the case are pitiful. When being treated for nervous troubles, I have been offered the entertainment of seeing in a doctor's book pictures of hysterical sufferers contorted into painful and unnatural postures. Now, Jasper, I am very earnest in what I say. Avoid the least taint of this stupidity as you would the plague. Tell your patient, if necessary, that his road to health may be a long one, but give him all the cheer and hope you can. Refrain from a look or word that his temporarily diseased imagination can construe gloomily. Re-

member that he would n't call you, or call upon you, if he were in condition to make a study of pathology, and don't let your intellectual delight in science blind your perceptions. So you will be my ideal doctor," Miss McKnight drew the young man toward her and kissed him lightly on the forehead, "as you are my dear boy."

"I believe there is sense in your suggestions. I only hope I shall remember them."

"Perhaps I had better adopt the plan of a monthly catechism. It is easy enough to see how these facts have helped people to swing to the extreme opposite views of Christian Scientists. Their *régime* at least promises a cheerful life and a cheerful death, for they fly every picture of discord and evil. You cannot do better than to take many lessons out of their book."

"You want to make a sort of mongrel of me, do you?" Jasper laughed.

"No;" Miss McKnight spoke wistfully; "we want truth, truth. We who believe the body to be God's creation as well as the soul, and believe in the action of food as an orderly, ordained means of sustaining life, must also believe in the action of material remedies; but the ideal doctor will not put the cart before the horse. He will not fail to consider the mind's action as first and most important. Right thoughts, right food, right exercise! If ever the rules for them shall be found and abided by — why, then, dear," Miss McKnight's eyes twinkled, "all you and your like

will be good for will be to mend up a broken bone here and there."

"Stop, stop. You might be overheard. Such talk hinders trade. Speaking of maltreated bones makes me think of Katherine Ormond. Did she say anything to you about Miss Laird?"

"Miss Laird?"

"The fair Marguerite over there." Jasper motioned with his head in the direction of the hall. "Her name when she is presiding at a tea-table in private life is Miss Laird. I met her the night Katherine sprained her ankle."

"No, Katherine did n't speak of her. We were not alone at all, and the conversation was general."

"I fancy they are good friends."

Miss McKnight looked interested. "Then that bright creature is genuine," she said, in a pleased tone.

Her nephew smiled. "What of that?" he asked.

"Oh, I like to know it. She is so full of life, she sparkles. I had quite a talk with her in there. She might be smart and naughty, you know. I am glad that she has a friend like Katherine."

"It is n't likely to do her much good; that is, not if Mrs. Ormond sees her first. *Noblesse oblige*, you know." Jasper laughed, and his aunt shook her head as if meditating on his words.

"By the way," he added, "it appears that Miss

Laird's half-brother, who lives with her, is in Uncle Robert's Works, and is making himself of some importance. Uncle Robert had occasion to send him some word last Sunday, and as I was there and this Sheldon lived in Montaigne, Uncle Rob gave me the note, and lo, the address was right here in my own hall. I had met Sheldon before on the eventful occasion of Katherine's sprain."

"What is he like? Does he give off little superabundant sparkles like his sister?"

"Not a bit of it. Reserved, self-contained kind of man. Good head, good eye. Looks you in the face in a natural, straightforward, dignified fashion. He 's a Stevens graduate, knows his *p*'s and *q*'s all right."

"They 're a bright pair of young people, then. I hope Mrs. Ormond's *noblesse* is n't going to cheat them of any pleasure they might have, and if they are of my way of thinking, Katherine is not only a pleasure, but a luxury."

"You are all broken up, are n't you?" said Jasper, smiling at her curiously.

"I am staying here too long for a person in rude health," returned Miss McKnight, rising suddenly.

"It is a little rude of you to be healthy, I admit; but wait a minute. There will be another item of my unexceptionable equipment at the door in a second. Don't you want me to drive you home? I am about to visit one of Dr. Granbury's

patients, whom he trusts me with because he says there 's nothing the matter with her."

"Very well. I 'll go, then; and *en route* I will be the power behind the throne and tell you what to say to her."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATHLETIC CLUB.

"It *is* the Wise Woman," said Katherine gladly, as her friend walked into the room one morning soon after. "When I heard the bell ring I hoped for you. Have you come to stay all day? Take off your wraps and make me happy."

"You are almost as nice a flatterer as Marguerite the milliner," returned Miss McKnight. "I hope I shall be more successful in withstanding you than I was with her, for I must n't think of staying all day."

"Then you have been hypnotized, too?"

"Oh, that is what you call it?" said Miss McKnight, seating herself beside Katherine's couch.

"How did you like her?" asked the girl, with interest; and in the light of Jasper's suggestion, it amused the visitor to note that she lowered her voice.

"Would n't I like anybody who offers to make me charming? I have warned Jasper that the phenomenon of Ninon de L'Enclos is to have a parallel. He is doomed to fall in love with me."

"He could n't be any deeper in, I 'm sure; but

Marguerite herself. She is n't an every-day person."

"No. You are right about that."

"I miss her, dear Wise Woman. I actually miss her. If it had been she instead of you who walked in when the bell rang this morning, I should have been nearly as pleased — perhaps even more so on account of the surprise, for I know she will not come unless she is summoned, and mother thinks it nonsense for me to send for her. Mother and Madeline don't know her. To them she is a business acquaintance only. They can't understand why I should wish to see her."

"I see. Are you having a pretty dull time of it, dear?"

"No. I am busy, and there are friends coming and going all the time. All the same it seems the most desirable thing in life to be able to run upstairs and get some trifle that I want, or to go into New York and choose my own dress instead of having Madeline bring me samples. You ought to see Madeline in the gown she is going to wear to pour chocolate at Emily Granbury's début. She is a dream!" finished Katherine, with enthusiasm.

"I shall see her, I suppose. I am going."

"Are you really? It is a red-letter occasion that tempts you into society."

Miss McKnight had taken off her gloves, and her fingers were flying as she knitted on a pair of silk mittens she had drawn from a small leather bag. She smiled at her work.

"Times are changed. I have submitted to being taken down from the shelf and dusted this fall. Jasper demanded it."

Katherine clapped her hands. "Joy! Who knows but you will chaperone me some time."

"I shall do as I 'm told, my dear; and I will confess, if the order came to take Katherine Ormond under my wing, the pill of society would become temporarily sugar-coated."

"Is society a pill, dear Wise Woman?"

"It has been for me of late years; I am old and lazy; but that hypnotic young woman we were talking about says I am in the youth of old age. You may meet me in the mazes of the ballroom, yet. If Jasper told me I was to dance, I suppose I should. I feel a dangerous atmosphere of giddiness gathering around me."

"Did Marguerite mention me to you?" asked Katherine, again dropping her voice.

"I was in there a minute yesterday, and I spoke of you to her. She merely said that Dr. McKnight had told her that you were getting on slowly, but surely."

"Did n't she ask anything? Did n't she — did n't she speak in a friendly way?" asked the girl wistfully.

"Why, it was simply in passing, dear," returned Miss McKnight, who had, in fact, been surprised at the cool and perfunctory manner in which the milliner had dealt with the subject of Miss Ormond when her customer brought it up

with the expectation of pleasing her. "You know she is very business-like in her ways, and I suppose very busy."

"Oh, yes, busy as a bee," returned Katherine. Nevertheless, she was disappointed. She would have liked to know that Marguerite reciprocated her own friendly feelings. She had longed ever since her imprisonment to see the face that had so often lighted for her into vivacity. Yet she could but have felt it a great embarrassment had the desired event of a visit from Miss Laird taken place. She knew that her mother and sister would regard such a social advance from the milliner as a piece of ridiculous temerity.

Katherine always felt intuitively more secure of her brother's sympathy in her own desires than she did in Madeline's. She seldom saw him alone now, but that very evening he came down from his room in smoking-jacket and slippers, and seated himself near her divan.

"Why, you look delightfully permanent," she said. "I supposed, of course, you were going with mother and Madeline to the musicale."

"I begged off. My head aches. I am going to call for them later. The music of your voice is all I can stand this evening. The thought of a piano unnerves me, and I would about as lief hear violin strings in their crude form in the back yard as to listen to Marteau himself to-night."

"Then you are hopeless, and would much better stay with your sister. I am charmed with my

change of programme. I have a novel here that I know is clever, and ought to be absorbing, but unlimited license to frivol takes all the fun out of it. The time I relish a novel most keenly is when there is a lot of pressing work waiting for me, and I promise myself every page to turn only one more leaf. These last weeks have reduced me to the condition we used to be in the Thanksgiving afternoons of our infancy, when mother told us we could go to the closet any time, and cut any pie there was there. I am simply cloyed with rest and recreation."

"Is that what you call it?" returned Gilbert dryly. "In your place, I should be so savage by this time that I should shy a pillow, or something not so soft, at every person who entered the room."

"How alluring you would be to visitors! I sha'n't shy anything worse than a kiss at you while you remember to bring me flowers." The girl drew toward her a single great rose, a veritable treasure-house of sweetness, which shot out healthy green leaves from its woody stem.

"For real enjoyment, give me one American Beauty rather than a dozen," she said.

"For real economy I will, fair Katherine." Gilbert leaned his tired head against the chair-back. "If there is anything under heaven you want, Kitty, the least we can do is to get it for you, — that is, if it is modest, like one rosebud, for instance."

"It is," said Katherine, in an odd tone, which

caused her brother to roll his eyes around toward her.

"Then you do want something."

"Yes, and it is as modest as a rose, and as fresh and sweet, and even better to look at. I've wanted it a long time." Katherine smiled, as a puzzled expression grew on the face which had by this time turned fully toward her. "You are the only one in the family whom I should dare tell that I want it, too."

"Well, that is fortunate, for if it weren't unmanly, I should confess to curiosity."

"Can't you guess? I should suppose you could guess."

"Animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

"Animal."

"Oh, I know. It is a bird."

Katherine's eyes twinkled narrowly. "Yes; if I allowed myself to talk slang I should say she was a bird."

"She? It's a girl, then." With a sudden bright thought: "It is Miss Laird."

Kate nodded slightly. "Yes, get her for me."

"I will!" Gilbert half rose from his chair.

"Sit down. You can't."

He sank back. "You don't tell the mother and Maidie," he remarked.

"Should you advise me to?"

"Why not? I think we ought to show that brother and sister some friendliness for the Hodgsons' sake."

"You do think so, don't you, Gilbert?" Katherine spoke in a tone of relief. "I knew you would, and that is a comfort to me even if we 're not — not let."

"I don't think you are very bright. Why don't you demand more millinery lessons given at the house."

"She owes me one, and I have tried for it; but mother says I don't need any more; that I can trim hats well enough now."

"That is what you get, you see, for not being born rich or handsome instead of so deuced clever, Katherine. Very short-sighted of you, very." Gilbert thought a few moments. "What kind of a plan would it be for me to run over there some evening and drop in on Tom Sheldon?"

Katherine looked eager. "A fine one if" —

"If what?"

"If you dare."

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough Your call might have consequences."

The young man nodded. "It would n't do to bring Tom here only to have him snubbed."

"Oh, I don't think mother would really *snub* him."

"Between you and me," remarked Gilbert, "I don't think it would be easy to snub Sheldon."

"Nor I. Of course any other man of our acquaintance would have felt obliged to come, out of common politeness, and inquire how I was

getting on. His not doing so is very pointed, I think."

"Very likely he does n't know enough," said Gilbert.

"What an idea, Gilbert Ormond!"

"His education has n't run along those lines."

"He is n't stupid, and he *is* kind," said Kate warmly.

"Oh, yes; but he knows your recovery will go on just as well without him and his inquiries. He is probably ignorant and indifferent as to conventionalities."

"I should n't wonder," said Katherine, her brown eyes shining, "if he had been thinking you an odd sort of man to take no notice of your newly found friend after all he and his sister did for us that evening."

"Should n't wonder," agreed Gilbert. "I had n't thought of that. I shall go to see them."

He did not have an opportunity, however, to carry out the intention for the next few days, and one morning at breakfast he propounded a question over the beefsteak and coffee to his family.

"Guess who was at the Athletic Club last evening."

"Some of the men we met at Lenox," said Madeline.

"Jasper McKnight," suggested Mrs. Ormond.

"Oh, he is nothing new," said Katherine, who had begun to come to the table again. "I guess that it was Mr. Sheldon."

"Who is Mr. Sheldon?" asked her mother.

"Tom Sheldon! What an idea," laughed Madeline. "Katherine will be unsophisticated to the day of her death."

"She has struck it, though," said Gilbert quietly.

"Are you talking about the Hodgson young man?" inquired Mrs. Ormond coldly.

"Yes; Tom Sheldon," answered Madeline quickly, interrogating her brother with large eyes. "Whose guest was he? Did you ask him, Gilbert Ormond? Just let me tell you you 've gotten yourself into trouble."

"With whom? Your Ladyship?" asked Gilbert dryly.

"No. I warn you I shall have nothing to do with him, under the circumstances. If it were not for his sister, the question would be a very different one. But if you stand sponsor for him in one place, you will have to in another; and you will find yourself in a number of awkward positions, I can promise you."

"Why, you are a snob from Snobtown, are n't you, Madeline?" remarked Gilbert, continuing his breakfast, unmoved.

"This is no subject to tease your sister about," said Mrs. Ormond with dignity. "Madeline only shows common sense in the matter. It will be mistaken kindness in you, Gilbert, to try to lead that young man into other walks of life than those that are natural to him. He will meet mor-

tifications in society, and when he receives inevitable slights you will feel it very much. It was a strange Fate which ordained that he should do us that little favor the other evening, but don't try to compensate him in mistaken ways. If you stop right here, no harm will be done," added Mrs. Ormond less severely. "Of course, in a men's club, once in a way, he would not show at any particular disadvantage."

"On the contrary," returned Gilbert, "they were working in the gymnasium, and a little crowd gathered around to watch Tom, who became quite a lion before the evening was over."

"That is all very well; but you men adore muscle so, you might forget that it is not the greatest factor in a drawing-room. Let me remind you in time, my dear."

"Well now," said Gilbert, drawing his brows together argumentatively, "I wonder if you are entirely right. There is McKnight, for instance. He is a neighbor of Sheldon's an hour or so each day. Don't you think that if he and I together" —

"Impossible! Absurd!" interrupted Mrs. Ormond. "Jasper is far too sensible and too farsighted to compromise himself."

"Oh, mother!"

Gilbert threw his head back and laughed so heartily that Mrs. Ormond colored high with offense.

"No doubt he would be kind to them," she

returned, and her tone had an edge. "There is a saying which you remind me of, my son. 'Young folks think old folks are fools; but old folks know young ones are!' It would mortify me to have you approach those fastidious McKnights with any such foolish suggestion. I have feared this from the evening Katherine sprained her ankle. I feared her romantic attachment for the most distant connection of Pokonet, and your childish acquaintance with that boy, might influence one or both of you to encourage a renewal of friendship. They are nice, respectable, young people, whom we wish to be kind to, of course, for their uncle's sake as well as their own; but as for anything further — I am glad the subject came up, for it is as well to ventilate it first as last. Anything more than distant politeness on the occasions of meeting would be treating them unfairly." Mrs. Ormond finished in a deeply virtuous tone.

"I wish that Marguerite would go back where she came from," said Madeline, upon whose imagination Gilbert's suggestion of the scene in the gymnasium had taken hold. She liked a triumphant man, whether the arena of his successes were the ball-room or the football field. "Mr. Sheldon might be received anywhere. He possesses the art of making a good appearance and holding his tongue."

"It is nothing to you, in any case," returned her mother curtly. "I am really sorry Gilbert even introduced him at the Athletic Club."

"Please, ma'am, I did n't." Gilbert's grin was reflected in Katherine's face, as she eagerly listened for what should come next.

"Who did, then?" demanded Madeline.

"Our fastidious friend Jasper."

Gilbert looked around the table and observed the effect of his *coup*.

"I am astonished!" said Mrs. Ormond at last.

"Your looks do not belie you, mamma dear."

"Well, it was natural enough," said Madeline, "that he should take him over, once."

"He has proposed him for membership," said Gilbert, making the announcement with mischievous deliberation.

"He has!" exclaimed Madeline.

"Yes, at the suggestion of his uncle, who is Tom's employer."

"Oh, we begin to understand," said Mrs. Ormond. "Questions of social complication would not be likely to disturb the conclusions of Mr. Robert McKnight. Now, Gilbert, I suppose it is useless for me to attempt to convince you, but I assure you, you will be taking good advice if you will get this Mr. Sheldon blackballed."

Gilbert smiled. "Is that your best suggestion of ways and means to 'be kind to these nice young people'?"

"It is," returned Mrs. Ormond promptly, rising from the table with dignity "Nip in the bud this blundering attempt. You know very well the

Athletic Club's social side is an important feature of it. Cast your thoughts into the future and see Mr. Sheldon bringing his sister to its entertainments. What do you suppose will happen to her? She will be gently but decisively cut. In her own place she is useful and happy. Let her stay there."

"It will be very awkward," added Madeline, looking dark. "We must agree together to follow the same course, whatever it is. Anything else would be ridiculous." She flashed an anxious glance at her sister, who kept her eyes down.

"My friends," said Gilbert, "social distinctions never seemed so absurd to me as they do this minute. Madeline, supposing you were wrecked on a desert island with Tom Sheldon and his sister. Do you think you would cut either of them? It is my shrewd guess that you would cuddle down between the two, and allow Marguerite to serve you with oysters on the half shell, and permit Tom to find you a spring of fresh water. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity."

Madeline grew red as a peony, and the four arose from the table, somewhat stirred. Katherine clung to her brother as he half carried her back to her corner.

"Oh, Gilbert, I 'm so glad and so scared," she said, giving him a surreptitious squeeze.

"I don't know whether Tom will get in or not, at once," he replied aloud, "on account of numbers. You want a fire here, don't you?" he

added, glancing around the room, which looked chill in the gray, cloudy day.

"Yes, please send Jane," replied Katherine, seating herself, and half laughing as she squeezed two tears back into her bright eyes. "I am one of the sort of things that are good for nothing cold."

CHAPTER IX.

AN AVERTED DANGER.

In the couple of calls which Miss McKnight made upon the milliner before her final visit, they exchanged no word beyond business, save the one fruitless suggestion by the customer of Miss Ormond's name.

On the third occasion Miss McKnight smiled at her reflection in the glass, crowned by the dainty trifle which Marguerite called a bonnet and adjusted with a satisfied air.

"I knew it would please you," said the milliner, also surveying the reflection, her head on one side.

"I have n't said that it does," replied the customer.

"But one cannot look at you and doubt your good taste, Miss McKnight."

"Egotistical young woman! Is your standard then unquestionable?"

Marguerite laughed merrily. She was so freshly, happily, and spontaneously interested in her work that her comments, although sometimes trite, gained originality and convincing power from her lips. "Yes, I have a colossal self-confidence

which, had I been a man, might have made of me a second Worth."

Miss McKnight continued to regard herself. "That touch of rich red makes me feel as if I had painted my cheeks," she said.

"It is most becoming," said Marguerite firmly.

"I think you would better take it out. Let me be a symphony in gray."

"It would be desecration to touch it. It would move the picture into a poor light." Marguerite gestured expressively. "All the life would be gone. Oh, the contrariness of human nature! If only some of the people who need to be toned down could be induced to feel as you do!"

Miss McKnight smiled. "Your art has its drawbacks." Then she added: "I expect I shall receive a compliment from Miss Ormond upon this. She is a special ally of mine. I think we spoke of Miss Katherine the other day, and you said she was your customer, or under-study, or something."

"I taught her," answered Marguerite, and her sententiousness did not at all satisfy Miss McKnight.

"Oh, yes, I remember, and she had not quite finished when her accident occurred. Was she an apt pupil?"

"Very."

"I suppose you never go out to give a lesson."

"I have n't as yet. No."

"But you are not so busy now, I fancy."

"No. We are coming to the quiet season."

"I am sure Miss Ormond would be glad if you could go to her and give her her diploma."

"She has not expressed a wish that I should."

"Perhaps she thinks you are too occupied to spare the time. She said to me the other day that she missed her visits with you."

A warmth overspread the milliner's face. "That is very good of her," she said, but she spoke with gentle formality, and Miss McKnight was surprised to feel that mentally she was held away.

"Are you a native of Montaigne?" she asked.

"No, I come from a little town in Michigan near Detroit."

"And you live here with your brother." Miss McKnight regarded her with kindly, penetrating eyes, amused and a little piqued at this piecemeal method of getting information. "I have heard of him, as he is in my brother's Works."

Marguerite bowed. "I thought it likely that you belonged to the same family of McKnights."

"Yes; your neighbor, the doctor, is my nephew, my son in all but name. I brought him up."

Miss McKnight was not garrulous. She was introducing herself with a purpose. The milliner accepted her facts with polite assent, but made no comment.

"My brother is much pleased with yours," added Miss McKnight, and this remark went below the surface. A happy color came into

Marguerite's cheeks. "It is always a matter of thankfulness when the square peg gets into the square hole in this world. Apparently it is a family trait with you to find your right places."

"We are very fortunate," returned Marguerite, speaking with feeling, as she absently retouched the dressy bit of headgear which she now held in her hand.

"My brother is difficult to suit," her customer went on, "but he feels well content to have secured so able a man; one whose good sense and reliability relieve him from much care."

"You make me happy," said Marguerite, and her lustrous eyes and rosy tints made the words unnecessary.

"My brother is n't so young as he once was," continued Miss McKnight. "It is almost as good fortune for me as for him to know that he has at last found a person fit to fill the place of the valuable man he lost last year; so naturally the next thing I want is to see this Mr. Sheldon."

Marguerite looked up with eager frankness. "Fritz will come to see you," she said impulsively.

Miss McKnight smiled. "I want him to," was her quiet answer, "and you also. How would it do for you both to take tea with me Sunday evening?"

This proposition took Marguerite entirely by surprise. It was the first social advance which had been made to her in Montaigne; but she was

a self-possessed young woman, and her face betrayed nothing as she rapidly considered that here was an occasion to drop her defensive tactics. It would surely be a benefit to Fritz to be received in his employer's family.

"Thank you; we should be very glad to come," she answered, after a scarcely appreciable pause.

"Then I shall expect you."

And thus simply it was arranged that the first break should come in the habit of life this brother and sister had adopted.

Marguerite dwelt upon the invitation with elation after her customer had gone away. She did not even think of it as a welcome break in her own humdrum existence, for the girl had spoken truth when she averred that for her, life was not monotonous. Her devotion to that big, steadfast brother of hers was complete. It was the fact of his success, as proved by this astonishing advance, which swelled her heart until the pressure forced the happy moisture into her eyes.

She felt inspired with new confidence and joy, which made her see Miss McKnight's suggestion of a visit to Katherine in a light hitherto impossible.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to call there, ask as to Miss Ormond's progress, and discover if she would like to be shown those last touches which had been promised. All the world was rose color just now, this plan sharing the happy illumination; so as Miss Laird had no pressing

work for the afternoon, she took off the quaint gray garb which distinguished her in her show-room, donned a street dress as fashionable as it was quiet, and set forth on her errand.

She had no difficulty in finding the Ormond house, and arriving there, was shown into a dainty room, her first view of the interior of an upper class Montaigne home. It was charming to her eye, with its deep cushioned window-seats, harmonious hangings, rugs, and screens.

She had sent up her business card, it being the only one she possessed, and before she had finished regarding the pictures and other articles of interest about her, Madeline Ormond entered the room, the card between her fingers. The girl intended to address the visitor in an offhand manner, but at sight of the correctly garbed young lady before her, she paused and looked a second time. The distinction of Marguerite's appearance recalled Gilbert's enthusiasm for the stranger-beauty, while it surprised Madeline into inability to say at once the patronizing words which were on her tongue.

"How do you do? It seems to me it is dark here," was what she did say, moving at once to a window and giving the shade a needless rearrangement, lest she should be involuntarily betrayed into taking that faultlessly gloved hand as though it were that of any one of her woman friends.

Marguerite was surprised to see her. She had asked for Mrs. Ormond. Here was the girl Fritz had cared for; whose charms had inoculated him

against love. The two measured each other with a glance; but Fritz was indifferent now, indifferent. Marguerite's heart swelled triumphantly. She was still enjoying the glamor raised by Miss McKnight's welcome words.

"You asked for my mother," Madeline said, coming back and seating herself, "but she is lying down. I presume I shall do as well."

"Oh, quite. I merely wished to know how your sister is getting on."

Madeline was still excited from the breakfast-table conversation of that morning. Her imagination took alarm at the fact that the milliner had come to call. She connected the event with Jasper McKnight's attention to the brother the night before. It had probably elated Marguerite and made her presumptuous. In a small place like Montaigne, trifles were important. One could not be too careful. Madeline was between two fires. It would be impolitic to offend the best of milliners, but she must repulse with a firm hand Marguerite the would-be friend.

She raised her eyebrows in polite surprise. "Oh, you have taken too much trouble. My sister is doing admirably."

"Sufficiently so to wish to see me, and practice a little upon hat decorations?"

"Oh, Miss Ormond has sent for you, then?"

"No, but I am still her debtor, and having some spare time this afternoon, I came to see if she would like my services."

"Very good of you, I 'm sure," said Madeline, using a coldly affected tone which, to do her justice, she seldom employed. She felt herself in straits. If Katherine, with her indifference to conventions and worldly wisdom, were to spend an hour to-day with this attractive niece of Mr. Hodgson in the intimacy of home, the worst would happen. Relations would be established which could not easily be unmade. Fancy the other girls seeing Marguerite go in and out of the Ormond house on terms of equality and friendship!

"I am sure Miss Ormond will send for you when she feels like pursuing her fad," she added, with light indifference. "You will have a town full of rivals, Marguerite, the first thing you know. Miss Arnold the other day showed me an evening bonnet she had made, and really at first glance one would not suspect it was of home manufacture. She is nearly as clumsy with the needle as I am, and you deserve proportionate credit."

The roseate glamor which began to pale at Madeline's entrance had now entirely faded. Marguerite felt that she had put herself in the way of her first snub, and had received it. She had not attained to that lofty humility where slights cannot hurt, but she was too much mistress of herself to betray feeling.

"Then I will go back," she said simply, rising. "I am pleased to hear that Miss Ormond is progressing well."

Madeline rose too. "You and your brother

were good Samaritans to her," she said; and the embarrassment of the moment impelled her to add the very thing she would have left unsaid: "We were surprised to find in Mr. Sheldon an old acquaintance."

Marguerite's steady, dignified look returned her uneasy glance. "Yes, my brother has told me that you and he knew each other well in past days."

If it was any gratification to the speaker to see a flood of red pour over Madeline's delicate face, she had it. The girl could not reply. How much knowledge of those aquatic flirtations lay behind the clear blue eyes that composedly regarded her unwilling blush?

Where was the light and easy tone of patronage with which she would have liked to speed the parting guest? Instead, a lame, inarticulate murmur died away on her lips as Marguerite made her exit, and then Madeline stood a moment in quiet thoughtfulness before stealing upstairs to her room.

Katherine had doubtless heard their voices. If she gave her time to forget, perhaps her sister would not make the inquiries which were bound to be awkward. Not that Madeline repented her tactics. She only condemned the stupidity which had humiliated her at the termination of the interview; still, on the whole, it might have been worse. Marguerite was safely off, and Katherine had not seen her.

She had heard her though, or rather heard indistinctly some strange voice speaking with Madeline, and she had not forgotten the circumstance by the time she next saw her sister.

"What caller was with you this afternoon?" she asked. "I am so tired of myself I hoped you were going to bring her to see me, whoever she was."

Madeline assumed an indifference she did not entirely feel.

"Oh, no. It was none of our friends. It was Marguerite. She stopped to inquire how you were."

"What Marguerite?" Katherine was excited at once. "Not Miss Laird!"

"I don't wonder you are surprised. It was certainly an odd thing for her to do; yet it may come within her ideas of drumming up business."

"Madeline! Why did n't you tell me? What were you thinking of?"

"I am telling you, child. What is the matter with you?"

"But did n't she want to see me?" Katherine's eyes, always pathetic when not twinkling with fun, inspected her sister earnestly.

"She did n't say so." Madeline rapidly decided to tell the truth, much as she disliked to, not only because it was her habit, but because Katherine would surely find it out some time; so she added: "She offered to give you your finishing lesson."

"Why didn't you bring her in, then? You knew I wanted it. You are too bad. I shall send for her!"

The two girls looked at each other in silence, the elder resentful, the younger cold and determined.

"I knew that you would perhaps be vexed with me," returned Madeline, privately astonished after all that her gentle sister should show so much feeling, "but I acted for the best, and I believe you will agree that I did, if you will be cool and discuss the matter a little. You surely haven't forgotten what mother said to Gilbert this morning at breakfast. It applies now. We wish to keep our relation with those people a strictly business one. If I had brought Marguerite in here this afternoon, ask yourself honestly if she would not have gained a foothold that would have changed our status with her ever afterward."

"She is a bright, clever, dignified girl, whom I should be proud to have for a friend," said Katherine with feeling.

"There it is, you see," returned Madeline. "As long as you live in mother's house, you have no right to bring people here whom she disapproves."

Katherine controlled herself with an effort. "Marguerite is an artist," she said quietly. "If she happened to dabble in oils instead of ribbons, society would pet her."

"Exactly," agreed Madeline.

"Is our position so precarious that you are

afraid to have such a friend?" asked Katherine. "Pardon me for using strong language, but your attitude seems contemptible to me."

"Judge for yourself by all means when you have your own home," returned Madeline, too much alarmed at her sister's infatuation to lose her temper. "Here comes mother. Let us have this matter understood once for all." Mrs. Ormond came in, surprised at the excitement in her children's faces, and Madeline recounted to her the events of the afternoon.

"You are the arbiter in this matter," she finished. "I have said all I can to influence Katherine; but she evidently does not intend to drop her artist in ribbons to please me. She will bring ridicule and discomfort on us all if she goes on. The very fact that Marguerite has become such a prominent figure makes it worse. If she were a nobody whom Katherine chose to take up, the situation would be much less annoying than it is now."

"There seems to be a mistake," said Katherine, before her mother could speak. "Madeline jumps at the conclusion that Marguerite wishes to be taken up and befriended. She is, on the contrary, the most independent and self-sufficient person of her age that I ever came in contact with. I have had to feel my way even into an acquaintance with her. She interests me, she fascinates me, more than any girl I know."

Madeline gave a little laugh. "No other girl

you know has the advantage of being related to Pokonet. Remember, nobody asks you to be unkind to this paragon. She is n't injured by us any more than her brother was. You remember you felt inclined to shed tears over him at one time, and now you have had ocular proof that he is as good as new."

"Children! My dear girls," said Mrs. Ormond, "let me speak. I must admit, Katherine, that I am sorry to hear that you are bewitched with this bright young woman. Your sister's forethought was admirable this afternoon. Be as friendly with her as you like, or rather as you must, in her shop, although I should be glad if you determined not to go there any more. We owe a duty to our friends. It would be wrong to them to allow it to be possible to meet this Marguerite socially in our house. If you don't see it so, my dear Katherine, you are temporarily infatuated, and before the winter is over you will thank me for saving you from yourself."

Katherine felt sore, impatient, rebellious.

"I shall respect your wishes, mother," she said, "but of all the absurd tempests that ever raged in teapots, this is the fussiest. Madeline probably snubbed Miss Laird in her terror this afternoon" —

"I did not," declared the other calmly.

"And there is no danger of her coming again. I have missed a great pleasure, but Mrs. Grundy has been properly sacrificed to, and the Ormond

family, though not entirely *sans peur*, is yet so far *sans reproche*."

"I think she is safe," said Madeline to her mother afterward. The determined younger sister had passed an unpleasant quarter of an hour, but she felt repaid.

CHAPTER X.

MARGUERITE CONSULTS THE ORACLE.

THERE was no family in Montaigne whose friendship Mrs. Ormond valued more highly than the McKnights'. Gilbert and Jasper had been in the same class at college; then when one went into the law school and the other into the study of medicine, Mrs. Ormond and Miss McKnight kept up an interest in each other's boys, which the former had never allowed to flag.

The McKnight homestead stood on the brow of a hill in a well-kept park. Solid and handsome without, luxurious and tasteful within, it gratified Mrs. Ormond's soul to visit there, and added a hundredfold to that philanthropic affection and solicitude which Jasper and his career always inspired in her. To stand on the veranda of the spacious house and look down upon the surrounding country through natural avenues of fine old trees uplifted her to heights of æsthetic pleasure and material comfort, and made her feel that if any earthly consideration could make it a pleasure to be called "grandma," it would be to hear the word from prattlers who crept about these piazzas and called them home.

Miss McKnight had lived the quietest of lives during her nephew's recent absence in Europe, but her intimacy with the Ormonds had not been allowed to drop. Mrs. Ormond had stolen time from her engagements at least weekly to drop in upon her dear friend, hear the latest news from Jasper, and talk to his aunt of the doings of the important little society world of Montaigne. She smiled benevolently on Katherine's weakness for Miss McKnight's society. For a long time she did not believe in its disinterestedness, although secretly approving of her child's discretion; but she was forced at last to admit wonderingly that what she herself did on principle, Katherine did for pure pleasure. Katherine was an odd, sometimes a puzzling child, but Madeline was always entirely comprehensible.

Madeline and her mother frequently drove their little pony carriage to the McKnights' on a Sunday afternoon. Miss McKnight did not encourage indiscriminate Sunday visiting, and they liked to go on that day to emphasize their intimate relations.

The following Sunday Mrs. Ormond proposed one of these visits.

"Let us have a family sleigh-ride," suggested Gilbert. "Katherine is to make her début into the world again, and I suppose there is no pilgrimage she would rather make than one to the shrine of the Wise Woman."

Katherine assented with alacrity; but guests

dropping in during the afternoon delayed their start. Mrs. Ormond demurred about taking their invalid out at sunset, but Gilbert overrode her objections, and the four set forth for the park.

"The beautiful outdoors," said Katherine, drawing a deep breath. "You poor people cannot half appreciate it."

"Won't Jasper be surprised to see you!" ejaculated Mrs. Ormond with satisfaction. "You are not disobeying him, are you, Katherine, dear?"

"It is Katherine's ankle," said Madeline shortly. "I suppose she can tell better than Jasper how it feels to step on it."

"The needles are nearly all gone out of it," said Katherine. "I am really encouraged to-day to believe that I am out of light prison at last for good."

"You must do just as Jasper says, however," returned Mrs. Ormond with unction. "I wonder what he will say when he sees you!"

But the young doctor was not to see his patient to-day. He was not in the spacious, shaded, firelit room, where the guests were shown. Miss McKnight arose from the group around the hearth and greeted Katherine with enthusiasm.

"How good of you all to bring her here on her first outing. That is as it should be. We are enjoying blindman's holiday, and you can scarcely see each other," she went on; "but here is my brother, whom you all know, and here are Miss Laird and Mr. Sheldon, whom some of you know,

I am certain. Mrs. Ormond, Miss Ormond, Miss Madeline, and Mr. Gilbert Ormond."

Mrs. Ormond gasped. Madeline pinched herself, Katherine beamed, Gilbert smiled, the whole group standing and hovering about one another like ghosts in the fantastic firelight, while Fritz Sheldon helped the hostess to offer more chairs, and seat her guests.

Katherine managed to glide into a place next Marguerite. "You were so kind to come in and ask for me the other day," she said, with characteristic pretty earnestness.

"It is a pleasant surprise to see you out again," returned Marguerite. "Those miserable sprains lay one up still longer sometimes."

Mrs. Ormond began to inquire of Mr. McKnight concerning his health with a fervent solicitude and detail which would have charmed a hypochondriac, but which caused that hale old gentleman to wonder what in the name of sense the woman was after; while Madeline clung as tenaciously to Miss McKnight, and Gilbert, feeling that he had come to the pleasantest sort of surprise party, began to recount to his friend Sheldon the obstacles which a perverse Fate had thrown in the way of his visiting him.

"Jasper will be so sorry to have missed you," said Miss McKnight to Madeline.

"I believe he is usually at Dr. Granbury's at this hour," returned the girl, speaking at random.

"No, not so early as this. To-day is some special occasion."

"I dare say he made one," thought Madeline, "and who can blame him?" She was still uncomfortably stirred by the surprise of finding Marguerite in house dress sitting *en famille* at this exclusive fireside.

As soon as Mrs. Ormond decently could, she determined to rid herself of the objectionable sight of her daughter's happy *tête-à-tête* in the corner with the milliner.

"You know it really will not do for us to stay excepting for the most formal call to-day, dear Miss McKnight. It is Katherine's first venture, and Jasper would have a right to scold us if we kept her out after it gets too cold. Gilbert, come, dear. Madeline, are you ready?"

"A half an hour more or less won't make a particle of difference," protested Gilbert, who was deep in a discussion with Sheldon of a new by-law proposed for the Athletic Club.

"Let me be the judge to-day," said Mrs. Ormond suavely. "We will go at once, please."

They did go at once, and dead silence fell upon the party as they drove through the park, where the snow lay pure white and heavy on the evergreen boughs, and a new moon shone through the skeleton branches of the elms.

"Tom Sheldon has fallen on his feet," announced Gilbert cheerily, at last.

"Is he taken into the club?" asked Madeline quickly.

"Oh, that is n't settled yet. It is something

more important. He has a good position in the McKnight Works. It suits him down to the ground, and that he suits it was pretty well proved just now."

"I — should — think so!" returned Mrs. Ormond impressively. "That then explains it," she added after a minute, in a relieved tone. "I could n't possibly understand the situation, but this makes it clear. Mr. McKnight must indeed value that young man to have asked Edna to show him such civility, and of course he could not be invited without his sister. Miss McKnight's Sundays are so quiet, I suppose she thought nobody would know. It was our evil genius which suggested our going up there to-day. Poor Edna, how she must have felt to see us file in; but she behaved well, I must say. Her self-possession was as natural as ever."

"It is just possible that she was not disturbed," suggested Katherine.

"I was n't at all pleased with you, my dear," returned her mother severely. "Your manner to that young woman was intimate, almost affectionate. Can we not induce you to have any foresight?"

"Don't you want me to be nice to the Wise Woman's friends?" asked the girl demurely, happy excitement sparkling in her eyes.

"Miss McKnight's wisdom will surely prove equal to this occasion," returned Mrs. Ormond dryly. "She has done this to please her brother,

but you notice Jasper was not in evidence. Mark my words, he regrets now his foolish action in behalf of that Sheldon. What does an old man like Robert McKnight know of social laws? You will make a grand mistake if you count on Miss McKnight to uphold you in the course you would like to take. If you had her age and position, you could venture upon such an action as hers this afternoon, but you have n't, remember."

So Mrs. Ormond arrived home soothed by her generous compassion for her old friend discovered in an awkward situation, and by dint of dwelling upon Miss McKnight's probable discomfort she became once more reconciled to the world.

The object of her commiseration had at once upon the guests' departure seated herself again by Miss Laird.

"I am so glad Miss Ormond happened in," she said heartily. "I know it was a pleasure to her to find you here."

"She is always very cordial," returned Marguerite.

"Oh, she 's a nice girl!" declared Miss McKnight, speaking half to herself.

"Her mother objected to her cordiality in this instance."

"Did you think so?"

"I am sure of it." The girl regarded her entertainer with a doubtful yet winning smile. "Miss Katherine has just been reminding me that you are her Wise Woman whom she told me of

some time ago. That must explain the strong desire you have aroused in me to confide in you and consult you. Perhaps it is not right for me to begin at the very first opportunity to take your thought for my personal affairs, but the time and place are tempting. My brother is so engrossed with Mr. McKnight just now that he will not hear me. I want to ask you an important question."

"Ask, my dear. What are old women for but to help young ones?"

"Oh, how fortunate I am," said Marguerite with a fervor that touched her hostess, "that such a woman as you should have come to take an interest in me! I can lean so firmly on what you say."

Marguerite's strong and magnetic personality was such that Miss McKnight felt this speech to be flattering.

"This is the question: How much difference would it make in my brother's career to be in society?"

"Not so much as if he were a professional man."

"But it would make some difference?"

"Oh, good society is a good thing in moderation. If your brother rises to be a successful business man, he will have some social duties, — make a society of his own, perhaps."

"My questions may sound foolish to you, Miss McKnight, for Fritz and I were two country chil-

dren who, as we grew up, managed to get an education, and coming to a strange place have started life in a humble way, as you know. You probably in your heart think it absurd that social questions should vex me. They would not, I assure you, if my conscience would let them rest. We are very content. Fritz loves his work and I love mine. If it were only for my own pleasure, I am sure I should go on making things for women to wear on their heads. In the horse-cars and in shops I am always in my mind concocting arrangements to make the plain women look distinguished, and the pretty ones beautiful."

Miss McKnight laughed softly. "It is a clear case of art for art's sake," she murmured.

"So you see our obscurity is nothing to me, but I cannot rid myself of the feeling that without me Fritz would cease to be obscure. He is educated, he is presentable. In a dress suit he might pass for one of the Four Hundred." Marguerite gave a sad little smile. "Have I any right to stay with him; have I" —

A dry sob caught in the girl's throat, and she stopped for half a minute, then continued, —

"This is the first time I have expressed my feeling to any one. It would be folly to speak of it to Fritz, for he would laugh down the very idea of my leaving him; but I am dreadfully certain that I shall be, am already, a drawback to him. Straws show which way the wind blows. I called at the Ormonds' a few days ago to ask for Miss

Katherine, and hoped I might see her. Miss Madeline received me. She also dismissed me. I need not go into detail. She was civil, but she showed me unmistakably that a call from Marguerite was presumption. See how plainly I talk to you. I surprise myself."

"Did you tell your brother of your experience?"

"No, indeed. The least hurt to me is a severe one to him. If I go away from Montaigne, — if I leave him, it will have to be done in a way to quiet utterly his suspicion that it is for his sake."

"You would dread to go away from him?" asked Miss McKnight kindly.

"Fritz is my world," answered Marguerite quietly. "From the time we lost our mother and were separated, it was the one thing I lived and worked for, to rejoin him. We have been so happy until this little gnawing question crept into my heart. Dr. McKnight has proposed him at a fashionable club. My mind leaps forward and sees what will come later. Social affairs where Fritz might be popular but for me, and although he would say and feel that he cared nothing for that sort of success and laugh the whole idea to scorn, I know it would be to his advantage to meet socially people of refinement and position. We have n't that valuable heritage of cultivation that descends to those whose fathers and grandfathers were brought up in homes where the best books and pictures and music were familiar topics,

people whose every minute was not occupied in the strife for daily bread. Our fathers and grandfathers kept country stores and worked on their farms, and our heritage is health and ambition. I want Fritz's children to be born in a desirable social circle; not a fashionable one, necessarily, but an intellectual one. They go together usually, don't they?"

"Very often they do," replied Miss McKnight.

Marguerite heaved a deep, unconscious sigh. "Sometimes I wish I had come here, and, without trying to earn anything, lived on bread and water with him until he was fairly launched, or, better yet, not have come at all until he was on his feet. Yet how much pleasure we should have missed that our mutual affection and sympathy have afforded us. We could not know how long his probation would continue, and I felt elated and jubilant to find I could really help him. Alas, to think that very assistance is the crime he and I must both be punished for now. Is n't there something wrong, Miss McKnight, when my industry alone is considered to unfit me for association with people no better born or educated?"

"There is, my dear. Happily, it is not a large element in our country which looks down on trade, and the equality of the sexes which is slowly being recognized will bring about a new state of things. Women in the professions are socially eligible already, and some day a woman milliner will hold as good a position as a man milliner does to-day."

"It goes through me like a knife to think of leaving Fritz." The girl shivered.

"Don't think of it until I have thought. Brains that have worked as many years as mine move slowly. Keep up heart, Miss Marguerite. Your fears are perhaps like gigantic shadows on a curtain. A little stronger light will decrease them."

"You of all people must not put the Miss before my name," said the girl impulsively, comforted vaguely by the other's tone. "Oh, that name! It was a bit of childish audacity to emblazon it on my window. Why did n't I make hats in some quiet corner under no name at all!"

"People don't like their hats made that way. I assure you, I for one am proud of that neat little gilt 'Marguerite' in the crown of my bonnet. I turn it wrong side up as frequently as possible when there is anybody about whom I wish to impress."

The milliner regarded her new friend with a look of gratitude; but her brother that moment approaching, she made no other answer.

Just before the guests took their departure, Miss McKnight found opportunity to speak alone once more with Marguerite. She had been observing the girl carefully all the evening, and her observations had confirmed her favorable impressions.

"Is your brother's income sufficient to support you both?" she asked.

Marguerite looked grave and anxious. "It is, but I don't want it to. That alternative would be almost as hard as the other. I want Fritz to lay up money against the awful day when he is married."

Miss McKnight smiled. "I have been thinking," she said, "and my first bit of advice to you is to take your name off your window and door."

"Then you want me — you think I would better go out of business!" returned the other, startled.

"No. You can carry it on a little differently. The urgency of the case is n't so great as it was. You do not need all the 'properties' of the present trade."

"I am accustomed to thinking for myself," said Marguerite, after a pause, "and I am not sure I see your drift; but I consider it a great blessing to have enlisted your interest. You will let our talk of this evening be confidential?"

"Strictly so." Miss McKnight slowly nodded her stately head. "Have your name taken off. Perhaps it cannot be done at once, but let it be done as soon as possible."

The milliner regarded her wistfully. "I wish I knew" —

Her hostess laughed. "It is hard for the independent child to let herself be led blindly." She patted her guest's arm.

Marguerite flushed. "Forgive me. I won't be one of those who ask advice and then refuse it, only — what 's in a name? I don't see how it

will help matters at this late day. *I* shall be there, — as obstinate and objectionable a fact as ever." She gave a doleful little laugh.

"I have a nebulous sort of scheme in my head," said Miss McKnight. "I will tell you more, later."

"Fritz," said the milliner, as they rolled homeward, tucked into a crimson-lined sleigh, "I have decided to please you, and take my name off the window."

"Oh, I have grown used to it, now," said the young man philosophically; "I don't mind it so much. Still, I shall be glad if you think you will do just as well without it."

Marguerite was far from sure she should do as well without it, but she said nothing, and both brother and sister fell into a reverie under the frosty stars.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AID SOCIETY.

"ARE you going out by yourself, Katherine?" asked Mrs. Ormond, as her daughter passed through her room one morning soon after.

"Yes, mother. Daring, is n't it? but I have a tongue in my head, and money in my pocket, and with those two advantages you have always told me to be fearless."

"How does the ankle feel? Weak? Had n't you better have a coupé?"

"No, I thank you. I need only walk to the car. Then I can ride wherever I like."

Mrs. Ormond regarded her child critically. "That hat is very becoming. I do hope you will get some color into your cheeks. Where are you going?"

"To Marguerite's to take my last lesson. Then send in your orders, Mrs. Ormond. You will find my price as low as is compatible with the high class of work." Katherine kissed her mother with a flourish and was leaving, but the latter detained her.

"One minute, Katherine." Mrs. Ormond bit her lip undecidedly. "Are you going in the right spirit?"

"Yes, ma'am. With charity for all and malice toward none."

"I should like to trust you, my dear," feelingly.

"I should like to have you, please 'm."

Mrs. Ormond looked with unabated gravity into the laughing face. "I should far rather never have you make a hat or a bonnet," she said slowly, "than to have you visit that milliner this morning, or any other morning, if I considered only myself. Remaining away altogether would be acting on the safe side; but I know your heart is set on carrying through whatever you begin, and you are such a dear, industrious child, I cannot bear to thwart you. One recollection I want you to carry with you. I will not have that girl visiting at my house. Bear that in mind, and say nothing which might get you into an awkward position. I know you don't approve my decision. You would like to pet her for the Hodgsons' sake, if for nothing else; but it cannot be done. We have been over the arguments sufficiently. You have friends enough now, and the smart milliner is happy in her own walk of life. Let her alone."

"The Wise Woman" — began Katherine.

"Miss McKnight had her reasons for permitting that strange occurrence. It will end right there. You will see. Why, Katherine," Mrs. Ormond's voice took on a more solemn note, "think of this! Your brother actually reproached me for hurrying through our visit on Sunday, saying that he had had no opportunity for talking with Miss

Laird. Gilbert talking with Miss Laird in social fashion! Think of it. She is a good-looking girl, and young men are perfectly heedless. Do you want people to begin to say that the Ormonds, brother and sister, are hand and glove with the milliner Marguerite? That is what would happen in a week, if you had your way."

"You won't believe, mother," broke out Katherine, "that she is worthy to be any one's friend. You don't know her."

"Another word of that kind, and it will be my duty to forbid your going near her!" exclaimed Mrs. Ormond in exasperation.

Katherine shrugged her shoulder. "You need n't worry," she answered. "I won't bring mortification on" —

"That is my good child!"

"On Marguerite, I was going to say."

"Quite right, Katherine. Any motive you like, so it brings about the required result; and don't forget to be home in time for the society."

Miss Ormond set forth, rebellion in her heart. Opposition added fuel to the flame of her romantic admiration; but she had her comforting thoughts. Gilbert sympathized in her opinions, and now she could also anticipate her next visit with the Wise Woman, who, intuition told her, would be quick to see the characteristics which had interested her so deeply in Marguerite. She should enjoy talking of the milliner with her old friend.

So her cogitations ran on, until her car stopped at the corner nearest to Miss Laird's flat. She walked along the sidewalk, looking up as she advanced toward the familiar show-window unseen for so many weeks. It appeared strange. She looked again. Then she stood still and rapidly glanced at the neighboring buildings, to make sure that she had not left the car at the wrong corner. No, that was certainly the right building. There was the small sign, which read J. F. McKnight, M. D., but where was the gilded name which had grown to have a special significance for her? Marguerite. The word conjured up a girl, tall, straight, and graceful, in clinging gray gown, whose warm reddish hair was gathered high under its quaint shell comb, and the humorous light in whose eyes belied her grave lips. The window was bare of decoration. Had she gone? Had Madeline's *bête noire* vanished?

Katherine's heart beat a little faster as she made her slow and careful journey up the flight of stairs. She had time to consider the probabilities, and the most likely seemed that Miss Laird and her brother had removed to Newark in order to live nearer the Works. Mrs. Ormond would have been disheartened to know that the gleam of comfort her daughter extracted from this theory was that at the distance of Newark she might dare to be on more friendly terms with this contraband acquaintance than she ever could at the near range of Main Street, Montaigne.

Before she had reached the upper stair Katherine had received an offer of marriage from some vague adorer upon whom she looked graciously, making the one proviso that he lay no straw in the way of her intimacy with Marguerite Laird.

Arrived at the glass door, she was not surprised to find no name thereon; but she was amazed when the hinges turned in answer to her knock, and Lucia appeared.

"Why, Lucia, is that you? Where has Miss Laird gone?"

"Nowhere, Miss." The Italian smiled. "Would you like to see her?"

Katherine walked into the familiar room. No detail was lacking, but the shades at the windows were half drawn, so she had not been able from without to see the bonnets hanging on their branches.

After a short time the milliner came in, the same gracious, living picture as of old.

"Why, Miss Laird!" Katherine rose and offered her hand. Mrs. Ormond would have objected to her manner of doing so. "You startled me. I thought you had gone, when I could n't find your name anywhere. What has happened? Are you going to have a new sign?"

"I have n't decided," replied Marguerite, as she took the cordial hand. She might have added that she herself wondered quite as much as Katherine.

"I am sure there would be a general groan if you went away. I came to see if you had any time for me this morning. If not, you can appoint another day, and I will come again."

"I have plenty of time," replied Marguerite. "We are not driven now. Come right into the little room. Did you make the hat you have on?" She examined it with critical eyes. "It is good. I cannot teach you much more."

"I haven't your touch. I never shall have. No one has."

"Oh, you flatterer!" Marguerite smiled at the ardent tone. "I am going to give up trying to teach it, any way."

"Really? You are not going to give any more lessons? Why is that?"

Marguerite might have truthfully responded again that she did not know. Miss McKnight had put her head in the day before, and, with a smile and sibyl-like mystery and brevity, given that order, and her *protégée*, who did nothing by halves, proposed to obey her.

"Well, I have given it up," returned Miss Laird vaguely. "Perhaps I am growing rich and lazy," she added, with the smile and flash of the eyes Katherine loved to see.

"I 'm glad I found you in your mercenary and energetic stage then," said Katherine, seating herself and preparing to work.

The milliner proceeded to initiate her into further silken mysteries, which the pupil followed

with interest; but when she had the work safely in her own hand, she changed the subject.

"I was so glad to find last Sunday that my dear Wise Woman is a friend of yours."

"It is a pleasant surprise to me also, I assure you."

"She is better than the Lady from Philadelphia for Peterkins like me. She is my oracle, as I told you."

"She seems to me like a monument of strength," said Marguerite.

"That is what she is; yet charmingly unconscious and unaffected, like all big, noble people. I am so glad you know her."

"It was a delightful happening," returned Marguerite. "Her brother is my brother's employer, and he interested Miss McKnight in Fritz, so she asked him to the house and kindly included me."

"Exactly what mother said," thought Katherine swiftly. "I hope you will see more of her," she said aloud. "The Wise Woman is such a good friend to have." She looked up at Marguerite, who was working busily, and something in her face and attitude — nothing new, but the dignity and healthy poise that were always expressed there, prompted her to continue: "That is, if you are like most people, and enjoy making new friends."

Miss Laird smiled without looking up. "Of course I appreciate the honor of making a friend like Miss McKnight," she said, "but to tell the

truth I suppose my busy life does make me more indifferent than many to outside friendships. That, and the fact that I have Fritz."

"He fills your heart, then."

"Most satisfactorily," answered Marguerite, meeting her pupil's questioning brown eyes. She was too shrewd not to perceive that Katherine liked and admired her personally. Under different circumstances she would have been glad to meet her half way; but Katherine was Madeline's sister, and in spite of the childlike directness and simplicity which Marguerite found so winning in her pupil, she felt that she must strive firmly to hold to a formal relation with the girl, and Katherine went home, after lingering as long as she dared, her head full of an almost lover-like appreciation of the daintiness, brightness, and unapproachableness of the milliner, and her heart of dejection at a prospect which held out no vestige of an excuse to continue visiting her.

That afternoon was the occasion of the weekly meeting of the charitable Aid Society in the parlors of the Ormonds' church. This was a flourishing institution, energetically managed and well attended, and the babel of tongues often rivaled that of an afternoon reception.

Katherine was warmly welcomed back to the work that had missed her so many weeks, and she joined the coterie which had formed about Miss McKnight. The latter had been secretly amused this season to find herself an object of affectionate

interest in many quarters where hitherto she had only met respectful courtesy. The knot of workers which Katherine joined contained much of the cream of Montaigne society, and all listened with deference to Miss McKnight's remarks.

"Come right here, my dear," she said, as Katherine approached. "Here are some flannel seams ready for you to open."

"Now you are not going to sit next to Miss McKnight," said Betty Arnold, pouting saucily. "That is my place. Madeline has one side of her, and that must suffice for the Ormond family."

"Oh, that is all right," returned Katherine. "My place is permanent, right in her heart." She smiled, slipped into an empty chair, and threw her Wise Woman a kiss amid the protesting jeers of the little crowd.

"You haven't apologized for your tardiness, Katherine," said Miss McKnight, to whom Mrs. Ormond had complained impatiently of her daughter's errand.

"No, I've done better than that. There is only one apology that is admissible here, and that is the fine. I have paid it."

"That is all very well officially; but privately you must give an account of yourself. How have you spent these shining hours?"

"Improved them just like the little busy bee," returned Katherine demurely, with a glance at Madeline.

"Let us judge of that," pursued Miss Mc-

Knight. "I 'm the judge, and this is the jury. We will decide whether you may be forgiven after you tell us where and how you have been employed."

Katherine felt some surprise at this persistence from the most delicate woman of her acquaintance. She met the kind dark eyes that were fixed upon her with an expression more earnest than jocose. It was the Wise Woman. She had some reason.

"Well," returned the girl after a pause, "since you will have me boast, I was learning the last bits of wisdom any one can know on the subject of hat-making. I, my friends, am a graduated milliner." Katherine lifted her chin with a lofty air; but she did not glance at Madeline. She knew her sister would be incensed with her for remaining so long with Marguerite.

"Oh, that is it," returned Miss McKnight. "Then I need not send out the jury, I am sure; for all must agree that you were wise to make hay while the sun shone. It is n't to shine for any more lucky girls, I understand."

"How is that?" asked Madeline Ormond.

"Miss Laird refuses to teach any more."

"Indeed?" returned Betty Arnold. "Then we that took the lessons when we could were fortunate. I don't know that I shall ever trim a hat again, but I like to feel that I know how. It is Marguerite, Miss McKnight is talking about, girls."

"I did n't know her name was Laird," said a

young lady with a low voice and a drawl. "I always supposed she was French. She is very good."

Madeline cast a quick glance at her sister. She wondered if Katherine could sustain with equanimity the thought of an individual having the *entrée* to their house who could be characterized as "very good" by august lips having an English accent.

But Miss McKnight's lips were equally august although unaffected, and they were speaking again. "Oh, no, she is not French. Her mother was a Hodgson. One of the Long Island Hodgsons, you know." The speaker cast a calm, deliberate glance around the circle, as though certain of being understood. "Hodgson's Point was named for the Thomas Hodgson who came over early in the seventeenth century. He was knighted by the king for distinguished service upon his return to England."

Madeline gave Miss McKnight a glance in which bitterness mingled with surprise. "Katherine has been talking to you," she said, all her suspicions aroused.

She received a clear, honest gaze which confused her, and made her wish she had not spoken so impulsively.

"No, she has not, my dear. Why? Did you know it?"

Madeline's inarticulate response was lost in Betty Arnold's voice: —

"I wonder why Marguerite won't give any more lessons?"

"Can you wonder at it?" returned Miss McKnight. "Especially gifted persons always suffer in teaching. The more delicate the artistic perceptions, the more a teacher is worn upon by contact with lack of talent."

"I call that a cruel joke," said Betty, pretending to be seriously offended.

Miss McKnight laughed. "Of course present company is always excepted; but while you, my dear girls, are all bright enough, your talents may not be cultivated in the direction of perception of color and form, and an artist might easily be expected to tire of a branch of work which is really drudgery. We should not criticise Paderewski for objecting to teach the rudiments of piano playing."

Katherine's white cheeks were beginning to glow, but she was the most industrious sewer in the circle.

The English-speaking young lady laughed. "Marguerite's abilities seem to have made an exalted impression upon Miss McKnight."

"Oh, Miss Allington, when you are as old as I am, you will not hesitate to name an artist when you see one, in whatever branch the divine spark exhibits itself. Of course I know Miss Laird's uncommon gifts are evident to you. You have recognized that there should be some new name coined for her art. I ask you, does 'milliner'

convey an adequate idea of that sense of harmony to which she manages so cleverly to make stiff fashion bow?"

Miss Allington looked knowing. She was not proof against deference from such a quarter. "Marguerite is artistic. There is no doubt of that. I did not know she was your *protégée*, Miss McKnight."

The latter lifted her hands with a little deprecatory laugh. "Nor is she. I think Miss Laird would smile at the idea of being any one's *protégée*. I am old and slow, and while you girls have been being made lovely by her magic touch, I have rather stupidly kept on in the accustomed ruts, until lately I have waked up. It is my usual way to be the last to adopt a fashion, and really this clever girl has made the old lady so fine that it rather startles me to think I might have waked up too late."

"How might it have been too late?" asked Madeline, to whom all this talk was a painful surprise since, as yet, she only saw in it encouragement to Katherine's ill-advised impulse of friendliness. She hoped she was going to hear that the bone of contention was on the eve of leaving town.

"Why, because no one can tell at what moment Miss Laird's caprice may lead her to give up her business."

"No danger of that, I fancy," said Betty Arnold. "I noticed yesterday that the name is gone

from her window. I suppose she is going to embellish it with some still more attractive sign — the coat of arms of Sir Thomas Hodgson, perhaps," added the girl mischievously.

"I don't feel so safe as you do," remarked Miss McKnight gravely, "and I propose to keep on the right side of that young lady. I suppose she is no freer from caprices and notions than the others of her sex, and as she can afford to humor her caprices, no doubt she will."

"I knew she was successful," said Betty, with curiosity and interest, "but I had no idea she had made such a good thing of it as that."

"My dear," Miss McKnight took a more impressive tone, "Miss Laird was never obliged to earn money. Did you think she was, all of you who have known her so much longer than I?" Well the speaker knew that in some minds she was addressing the necessity to earn was its one inexcusable feature. A dozen eyes were lifted to her. Among them were Katherine's, filled with surprise. She did not know that the alternative was the bread and water Marguerite had referred to in her talk with the Wise Woman. Nevertheless, bread and water will preserve life.

"The artistic sense in that girl," pursued Miss McKnight earnestly, "pressed for outlet. She was brimful of life and vigor. One can paint pictures and fill one's own and one's friends' walls, if they will not sell; but a collection of bonnets minus heads is unprofitable from any point of

view. Very well, Miss Laird wanted to make bonnets. How has she done it?"

"Extremely well," responded one of the sewers. "It would be a misfortune if she should get tired of it."

"I don't intend to let her drop me," said Miss McKnight, returning to her work. "I dare say she may be tired of her fad by this time, but I intend to coax her to continue to beautify my declining years. She and her half-brother, Mr. Sheldon, took tea with me on Sunday evening."

Miss McKnight's remarks had been cumulative in their effect, and now not a hand save Katherine Ormond's continued busy. Even Madeline had ceased to criticise, and only listened.

"Mr. Sheldon bids fair to be my brother's right-hand man in the Works," went on Miss McKnight, plying her needle steadily. "A very brainy young fellow he is, graduated high at Stevens. He has worked with so much push and energy since they came here, that he has had time to make hardly any acquaintances, but my nephew has proposed him at the Athletic Club, and when he is a member it will make it pleasanter for them. He has just such an unostentatious, well-bred air as his sister. Of course you have all noticed her quiet, distinguished manner, and that little twinkle that sometimes flashes in her eyes, showing how much amusement she has derived from playing store, as the children say. All the seams done, Katherine?" as the girl handed in

her work. "Well, you are a busy bee! Here is another little gown just like it."

Before the day was over, Katherine found a minute alone with her old friend.

"That was fine, dear, *dear* Wise Woman! What you are doing it for, I can't imagine; but my heart is just leaping for joy."

Miss McKnight patted the excited girl. "I have my reasons; but don't praise me. I have n't had such an amusing plaything in a long time. Mum, remember, Katherine!"

"Don't fear. I don't dare to be anything else, and I don't want to be now. All I care to do is to watch and listen."

CHAPTER XII.

TRANSITION.

Miss McKnight's remarks all fell on interested ears, and her hints as to making certain of Marguerite's continued services were not lost.

Betty Arnold was among the first to ascend to the milliner's abode under the influence of the novel impressions Miss McKnight had taken pains to produce.

No sign was on the door; even the legend which invited the customer to walk in had vanished. Miss Arnold rang, and shortly Lucia appeared.

"Is" — she found the name Marguerite would not come — "is Miss Laird at home?"

"She is. Walk in, please."

Miss Arnold entered the room, a show-room no longer, and looked about her discontentedly. She was in a parlor which betokened no occupation in particular. It contained the same wicker furniture she had been used to see, but new and dainty white hangings were at the windows, and an upright piano stood in one corner. The girl's eyes looked down disapprovingly upon the small-patterned brussels carpet in olive tints. She could

not tell whether it had always been there or not. She was still resenting the fact of the piano lamp and other ornaments which decorated the pretty room when the descendant of Sir Thomas Hodgson came in.

"Dear me," said Betty, by way of greeting. "I don't like this at all!" Her quick eyes took in the simple, becoming house dress which had replaced the gray gown. She had never shaken hands with her milliner. Why should she now? Why should n't she? Perhaps it would be necessary, to secure her object. She rose suddenly, and rather nervously held out her little hand.

Marguerite took it in gracious, composed fashion.

"You don't like this absence of properties," she said, sinking into a seat near her guest.

Miss McKnight had at last confided to her her plan of action, and Marguerite had obediently and gratefully accepted her own part in the little comedy. "Well," she continued, "you know this is not the season when people's fancies lightly turn to thoughts of new hats."

"Oh, is that all?" returned Betty, relieved. "Is it only because this is the dull time?"

"Partly that," said Marguerite, with easy nonchalance, "and then, really, this flat is such a little box, you know, one can't have room for everything, and I was homesick for my piano."

Miss Arnold's eyes widened anxiously. "Then don't you mean to keep up your business?"

Miss Laird smiled. "Surely it is a matter of indifference to you, Miss Arnold, now."

"Oh, you are just making fun of me. I can make hack hats well enough, but I want your ideas for all my nice things. Now do promise, Marguerite — Miss Laird, you won't give me up, any way."

Marguerite raised her eyebrows and laughed. "You are very complimentary. I had just about decided of late that I was too autocratic by nature to try to carry on a serious business. It worries me when people venture to have ideas of their own, if they happen to go contrary to mine. If I could establish a millinery monarchy, and make women wear the colors and shapes I dictate on their heads as the only means of retaining those heads on their shoulders, I presume I should enjoy myself; but as it is, I have been subject to a great many annoyances. Last week the climax was reached. A woman came in here with the most florid face imaginable. She was determined that I should make her a purple bonnet." Marguerite gave her shoulders a light shrug. "That decided me," she added, after an eloquent pause. "I determined to send for my piano."

"Really, Miss Laird, I promise to be a most obedient subject, with no ideas at all of my own about my complexion," said Miss Arnold anxiously.

"Oh, a young girl like you looks well in so many things," returned Marguerite carelessly.

"Never mind. I look best in yours," answered Miss Arnold, rendered more determined by Miss Laird's indifference.

Public favor is so capricious, there is no assurance but that Marguerite's star might have waned or been eclipsed before long, had she gone on in the same path; but this change of plan, which she owed to Miss McKnight, only sharpened the interest felt in her. Betty Arnold was not slow in spreading the disconcerting news of her retirement from business, and many were the protesting and anxious visits which the handsome milliner received in her dainty bower, where calls took on a semi-social character before the self-seeking guests realized it.

The Ormonds were not among these. Madeline had gone home from the sewing society, and, closeted with her mother, had given her a succinct account of Miss McKnight's astonishing talk, to which Mrs. Ormond listened with amazed attention.

"I suppose Katherine was delighted," was the first remark she made when the narrative was finished.

"Of course she was," returned Madeline, "but we have not exchanged a word on the subject."

Just then a knock was heard on the door of the room where they sat, followed by Katherine's face, which she intruded through a narrow opening.

"Is this a private conclave?"

"No," answered Mrs. Ormond. "We want you. Madeline has just been telling me the re-

markable things Edna McKnight told your company about that very annoying girl. It seems there is never to be an end to the subject. We need you to throw light upon this. What is your Wise Woman after?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure," answered the girl, as she came in and seated herself.

"Now, Katherine, don't dodge, or prevaricate, or make fun, or anything," said Madeline, who looked heated.

"Thank you for this subtle flattery," returned the other, too content to refrain from a laugh. "Gaze into my eyes. Aren't they as clear as a limping stream? The Wise Woman hasn't honored me with her confidence; but what should she be after? She stated a lot of facts that seemed to interest her, and certainly interested us. You would better be blessing your lucky stars that I can make you a hat if Marguerite won't, instead of looking grumpy."

"My dear," said Mrs. Ormond, "the circumstance that has put us in an awkward position has been that those young people might claim some right to our notice through the Hodgsons. We were obliged to be careful. Miss McKnight's statements are indeed interesting, and very surprising. I don't quite know just what to do in the matter."

"Wait and see what other people do," suggested Katherine.

"That is just what I was thinking," said Mrs.

Ormond reflectively, not perceiving the veiled sarcasm. "So don't alter your behavior, Katherine, at present. You have taken your last lesson. Keep away from Miss Laird now altogether. I have no prejudice against either brother or sister; but because of old acquaintance with their humble connections, we cannot act in the same freedom as some others."

"Do you call Sir Thomas Hodgson a humble connection?" asked Katherine, with twinkling eyes.

"We did n't know him," observed Mrs. Ormond briefly. Katherine suddenly arose and threw her arms around her mother's neck.

"You are nice now, dear mamma," she exclaimed, punctuating her words with kisses, "but how gilt-edged you would be if you would snap your chains and call your soul your own!"

"And lose half the pleasure in life by being odd," said Madeline. "I don't see how you came to be such an odd sheep in the family. I feel years older than you, of late, Katherine, and am forever afraid you are going to do something imprudent."

Katherine only laughed again. Her mother was leaning against her affectionately, with the feeling that this uncalculating child's good points were an undeniable comfort, if she did cause her trouble.

Katherine was awaiting her opportunity to inform her brother of the events of the day.

He received her news with all the appreciation she could ask, and together they discussed what could be the Wise Woman's object in taking so much pains.

"We may as well put it down as another case of hypnotism," said Gilbert at last.

"We are very likely overreaching ourselves," returned Katherine. "It is probably pure benevolence on the Wise Woman's part. She wants justice done to a well-informed, charming girl, who is at present just betwixt and between, and has no social life at all."

"To-night will settle Sheldon's admission or non-admission to the club," said Gilbert.

After that bit of information Katherine's bright eyes refused to close until the late hour when she heard her brother's latchkey turn in the house door.

She listened till his step sounded on the stairs, when she left her bed and opened her door a crack.

"Gilbert?" she whispered.

"What?"

"How did the vote go?"

"He 's elected."

A shadowy white sleeve was thrust through the opening, and Gilbert took the smooth hand over which the lace was falling. They exchanged a hearty handshake, and a guilty, suppressed laugh. Then Katherine's door closed noiselessly.

He stated his news at the family breakfast-table next morning, where it was received with interest.

"Dear me," Mrs. Ormond laughed, "this is quite astonishing. I 'm through prophesying about those young people, and only ask what next?"

"We shall see what next at the ball Thursday night," said Madeline. "Miss McKnight is one of the patronesses, and perhaps by her encouragement Mr. Sheldon will bring his sister. I don't suppose they can dance a step, either of them. Just fancy how queer it will seem to see Marguerite sitting around in corners with idle hands. I pity her, I really do," added Madeline magnanimously, "and I wish she would have sense enough to go back into the country where she came from." Here the young lady's thoughts ran on, but inaudibly. Miss McKnight's praise of Sheldon had pleasantly excited her, added to Gilbert's description of his physical prowess. She anticipated meeting him. It would be enjoyable to renew her power over an admired man, yet the question of keeping him in his place came in there. She was not sure even yet that she wanted him to come to the house. The situation was one that demanded clever treatment, and Madeline believed in her own cleverness and enjoyed exercising it.

Meanwhile the object of her thoughts was being mildly surprised by the unexpected events occurring daily in his cozy home. Entirely unsuspicious that any ulterior end was being served by the metamorphosis in his surroundings and his sister's daily habits, he enjoyed the change. It was luxury to lie on the lounge in the evening,

and hear Marguerite drum away tunefully upon the piano. She had a faculty for remembering melodies, and it had been her gift from childhood to "play by ear" in a manner which was the marvel of the neighborhood. Fritz liked the little marches and dances which tinkled along rhythmically under his sister's fingers, and he used to lie there and listen, and look about him while the changed room was a novelty, and feel as serene a content as he might ever hope to know in a lifetime.

One evening, as they were situated thus, there came a knock at the door, and immediately Miss McKnight walked in.

"How much comfort I have disturbed!" she exclaimed, as Fritz sprang from the couch and his sister from the piano stool. "My nephew has dropped me here while he goes to make a call in the neighborhood," she added, as she was welcomed. "I thought it would be much pleasanter to talk to you than to sit alone in the carriage waiting for him. What a pretty waltz you were playing, Marguerite. This sister of yours is a clever girl, Mr. Sheldon; do you know it?"

Fritz smiled. "I've begun lately to believe she must be. Hasn't she fixed this place up nicely? Why, I feel like a Vanderbilt when I come home at evening. Marguerite has been such a steam engine I like to think she is resting at last."

Miss McKnight exchanged an amused glance with the smiling girl.

"She will not be allowed to rest too long, Mr. Sheldon. We can't spare her."

"Don't encourage a return to the shop, please. These few days have turned me into such a Sybarite that I could n't stand it. There is n't any need of it, either."

"Marguerite must compromise, then," returned Miss McKnight, breaking into a laugh as she spoke, for Fritz's unconscious earnestness lent still more humor to the situation. "She can do a little work *sub rosâ*, perhaps. You know it is a pity for steam engines to grow rusty. Let me congratulate you upon your entrance to the Athletic Club."

"Thank you. I am very much obliged to Dr. McKnight. I anticipate much benefit from my membership. An hour in the gymnasium is just what I need occasionally, to keep in shape."

"I suppose you are coming to the ball next Thursday."

Fritz looked at his sister. "I received my invitation, but it will be just as Marguerite says. I don't care much about it myself, and I certainly shall not go without her."

"I should think you would go, both of you. Of course such a gathering is less interesting if one does not dance, but I have good grounds for believing you can both dance."

Fritz smiled at his sister, then back at the guest. "What is your reason?"

"Because you come from near Detroit. An

army officer once confided to me that Detroit girls were the best dancers in the country. Of course you know the wearers of shoulder-straps are authority on dancing. I had a boy cousin once whose mother thought of West Point for him, and asked him how he supposed he should like army life. He answered reproachfully: 'Why, mother, you know I could never learn to waltz!' So you see why I am certain that being brought up near a centre of terpsichorean art, and playing such crisp little dances, this girl can dance them too."

Marguerite nodded. "Fritz may be grateful yet for the way I used to drag him around, an unwilling partner. I had him in very good condition once. Do you think you remember, young man? Miss McKnight, do you think we would better go to that ball?" Marguerite's eyes looked more serious and large, and more nearly frightened, than her guest had ever seen them."

"Yes, I would think about it," was the answer, and Marguerite felt that this was equivalent to another order.

The next day Miss McKnight looked in once more, and found her *protégée* alone.

"That ball may be something of an ordeal for you," she said to the girl; "I can't deny it; but I will help you all I can, and the time is as ripe as it ever will be for you to take the plunge."

"I feel like a fish," said Marguerite, "who is trying to make up its mind to take an excursion into the atmosphere."

"Yes, I understand. If you were not of good fibre, I should not expect you to make a success of it. You may have something to endure; but what are a few stares and a cold shoulder or two?"

"If Fritz perceived them, they would be enough. It would be his last appearance at a social function in Montaigne."

"I am calculating that he won't perceive them."

"He may receive them on his own account in punishment of his temerity in bringing me," said Marguerite, with a burning blush of excitement.

"Don't borrow trouble, child," said Miss McKnight cheerily. "That brother of yours carries his credentials in his face and physique. He is entirely unsuspicious of these narrow, spiteful ebullitions we are talking about. I think if he should receive one, he would look down with that kind, questioning gaze of his at the little wasp who stung him, and decide that tight lacing had spoiled her disposition. You remember the story of the brawny miner who picked up a dainty pistol belonging to an Eastern dude, and said: 'If you should ever shoot me with that, and I should find it out, I 'd lick you like thunder.'"

Marguerite laughed, and her spirits rose.

"I won't be a coward," she answered. "Nothing venture, nothing have."

"That is right," returned the other with satisfaction. "Now let us talk about your gown."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ATHLETIC CLUB BALL.

It was a matter of course in the Ormond household that when the girls were going out to any entertainment, the energies of the feminine portion of the family should be concentrated on Madeline's toilet. Mother and sister took equal pleasure in setting off the girl's exquisite prettiness to the best advantage, and when they had finished, exchanged significant glances of covert admiration which they fondly imagined she did not observe. Little wonder that she came to accept their ministrations as merely her due, and was exacting in her demands.

No one, in her estimation, could dress her hair so becomingly as Katherine; but on the night of the Athletic Club's reception, she was not entirely pleased with her sister's efforts.

"Your fingers are all thumbs," she complained, as she sat before her dressing-table, while Katherine twisted for the second time the silky hair that was proving unruly. "What is the matter with you? I want to look better than usual this evening, not worse, and I must do so, if we don't get started till midnight."

"So you shall," returned Katherine good-naturedly. "You will look like a dryad in that pale green and silver gown; but stop gazing at me in the glass." Madeline was slightly frowning in her impatience. "I 'm so modest, it embarrasses me."

Madeline lowered her eyes to her pink finger-nails. "I don't mind telling you that I am out of sorts about to-night any way," she returned. "I expected surely one of the reception committee would ask me to receive with her. It is very strange that Miss McKnight did n't, so long as she did n't ask you. Of course she likes you best."

"I should n't think you would feel that at all. You know those positions are always given the débutantes."

"I believe it was just stupidity in Miss McKnight. I asked Jasper the other day who was going to receive with her, and he said he did n't know."

"Oh, Madeline. I 'm afraid that sounded" —

"No, it did n't. Not the way I said it. Jasper looked rather dazed and surprised, and I don't believe, as he was n't here last year, that he knew the reception committee had girls to aid them. I don't believe Miss McKnight knows it. It is too provoking. We ought to have coached her; for she takes so little interest in society affairs that I dare say at this moment Jasper is reminding her that she had better put on her best black silk."

Katherine smiled. Her own cheeks were flushed with the excitement she felt this evening, an emotion which had already annoyed her sister in its results.

"Then beside that," went on Madeline, "there is that Sheldon business. I suppose you will fall on the necks of both brother and sister in public, just as you did at the McKnights' that Sunday."

"I will endeavor not to embrace Mr. Sheldon; but, Madeline, don't you mean to add your mite to making them welcome and happy to-night if they do come?"

It did not propitiate Madeline to have her important favor characterized as a "mite." "I don't know what I shall do," she replied loftily. "When people step out of their places, they must take what comes."

"You heard Miss McKnight's public avowal that she considers them her social equals. Are we higher up on the ladder than the Wise Woman?" asked Katherine, pinioning a golden tendril at the summit of the twists she had coiled into place. "You know you said the other day that we must agree as a family on a line of action or we should be ridiculous, and that is worth thinking of."

Madeline shrugged her shoulders. "Fortunately, one does n't see much of other women at a ball. If Tom Sheldon does know how to dance, I don't mind giving him one number. As for the transplanted milliner, you may have time to

sit around in corners with her, but I certainly expect to be otherwise engaged. There, Katherine, that looks very well. That will do. Now you would better go on and dress, or Gilbert will get out of patience, as usual."

Katherine hastened away to her own room and made her toilet, which was never an anxious one. She possessed a normal share of girlish vanity, but she liked simple clothes for herself as much as she did elaborate ones for Madeline. Her thick brown hair grew prettily about her face, and had in it a looser wave than her sister's. When she had twisted it high upon her head and stuck through it a golden dagger, put on white shoes, a white low-necked gown, and pulled her long gloves up over her round arms, she was ready to take her place in the giddy throng; and a desirable place it was. Everybody liked Katherine Ormond, men, women, and children, one reason being that she was not always thinking about herself, and another that she was bright and good-natured. Young men did not become feverish over her dancing programme, nor dwell on the thought of her after she was gone, and send her flowers without a cause; but they were well entertained while they were with her, saw the world merrily through her narrowing, starry eyes, and unanimously voted her a trump and a jolly girl.

This simplicity and dainty indifference to furbelows always characteristic of Katherine, her brother liked. It was a part of her. When she

entered the parlor to-night, he regarded her with approval.

"The butterfly almost ready?" he asked.

"Yes, she will be down in a minute. Gilbert," Katherine almost whispered his name as she glided up to him where he stood by the fireplace, "do you think they will be there?"

"From the interest Miss McKnight takes in their fortunes, I rather expect they will," he answered.

"I can't get them out of my head an instant," said Katherine. "In spite even of the Wise Woman's protection, I feel as if that hall would be a den of lions for Miss Laird. You and I must do all we can for them. Mother won't like it, I suppose, if you show Marguerite the least bit of attention, yet if the men hold off as well as the girls, I shall never get over it, never."

"Oh, I 'm going to stand by the daisy; but she scares me stiff. I suspect I shall break the record and strike both Scylla and Charybdis to-night. I shall have to blow on my fingers all the time I am conversing with your fair friend, and afterward mother will scorch me with her displeasure."

"Oh, but Marguerite is n't a bit freezing when you know her," responded Katherine earnestly.

"Perhaps you might coach me a little," suggested Gilbert. "How would it do for me to say, 'Oh, I do think these bias bows cut square are perfectly fascinating on hats'? If I throw off some little thing like that to begin with, would she thaw, do you think?"

"I 'm sure she would," laughed Katherine. "Oh, here comes mother — te tum te tum, te tum te tum" — And when Mrs. Ormond and Madeline entered the room they found the conspirators indulging in a guilty and vigorous two-step.

"Well, children, can't you wait?" laughed the mother.

"'Oh, nymphs and shepherds, come away,'" ejaculated Gilbert, pausing to admire his younger sister in her airy robes.

"Well, I 'm ready to come away," answered Madeline, smiling complacently. "It is high time, too. I have promised the first dance to Jasper McKnight."

The hall looks very well," said Katherine. "Mrs. Arnold was ordering the finishing touches when I took the lamp shade over this afternoon."

"I wonder if Betty is going to receive with her," said Madeline, unable to turn her mind away from the rankling fact that her charming gown would not appear in the receiving circle which would stand among the palms at the end of the hall.

"Why, no," replied Katherine. "No doubt she will choose Emily Granbury, a débutante, and her own niece."

"It is a very convenient situation," grumbled Madeline. "There is none better for picking and choosing one's partners."

"It seems strange that Edna McKnight should have been chosen on the committee," remarked

Mrs. Ormond, who was nursing a small secret injury of her own. "I trust she is Wise Woman enough to know what to wear. Her evening gowns must be two years old, the newest of them."

"Follow my example," smiled Katherine, "and always trust the Wise Woman."

Her faith in this case was justified a little later. Miss McKnight knew how to be splendid, and she chose to be so this evening. As she stood in the bower assigned to the reception committee, her appearance was imposing. Her trailing gown was black velvet, the front of the corsage frosted white with precious lace. In her fleecy hair stood an aigrette of quivering diamonds, and the same jewels flashed upon her bosom. Beside her, apparently no less reposeful and self-possessed in manner, stood the girl she had chosen as her aid, a girl who proved the sensation of the evening both to those who knew who she was, and to the many who either had never looked upon her face, or else now failed to recognize her.

Her dress was lustrous white, with short, puffed sleeves. Her smooth neck rose from a frill of white chiffon, and her head was set on those fine shoulders with the proud poise of strength and beauty. She carried marguerites, and in her coppery hair they lay or lifted their frank faces at the most fortunate and becoming angle. She was a distinguished specimen of girlhood. The other young creatures serving on the same committee, showing their pleasurable excite-

ment by talking and laughing at the same moment, did not show to advantage beside the quiet maiden with her gracious, grave countenance, whose every word and smile, although apparently spontaneous, was anxiously weighed.

The Wise Woman had indeed taken the bull by the horns. The audacity of the arrangement caused a great strain upon Marguerite. Nothing less than that inheritance of pluck and stamina that had come down to her from the pioneers whose names were on those mossy stones in the Pokonet cemetery could have carried her through it. One of the most painful realizations possible to a woman of her temperament was upon her. To feel that she was where she was not welcome; that she was among people who looked down upon her, who believed her to be pushing, and considered her elated by the prominent position which she had succeeded in temporarily, securing, — all this was misery which turned her pale. She felt like one in a dream while hearing Miss McKnight's pleasant voice repeat: "Allow me to present my young friend Miss Laird. Let me introduce you to my friend Miss Laird. I believe you know my friend Miss Laird."

The reply to this latter form was nearly always courteous, but the girl sometimes detected a glance or a gesture which, in her acutely sensitive state, was felt like a dagger thrust.

Involuntarily, her eyes often roved about the hall in search of Fritz, to gather new strength from

a glimpse of his broad shoulders, if she could not see his face.

Dr. McKnight was personally conducting him about the room, introducing him, and spicing each introduction with remarks which made stiffness impossible, and heightened Fritz's impression that McKnight was a most friendly and pleasant fellow, although he was leagues away from a suspicion of the importance of the favor that was being done him.

He had joined a club which had invited him to a party, and he was glad for Rita's sake. She used to enjoy dancing so much, he hoped she would have a good time. She certainly looked stunning in that shiny white dress, and it was very fortunate that Miss McKnight could help her to get acquainted with the Montaigne people. Marguerite used to hold silly notions about not being received in society. Ha, ha! That was a good one. He watched her, looking like a princess and inclining graciously as guest followed guest, and he determined to tease her a little tomorrow.

There were a number of pretty girls here. Fritz liked to look at them. He happened to be glancing toward the door when the Ormonds entered, and his eyes grew bright as he saw Madeline in her nymph-like garb.

"What a fairy she is!" he thought. He had forgiven the Ormond family the wound they had dealt him through this representative. They were

all very civil to him. Evidently they knew nothing of that fortnight whose experiences closed one chapter in his life and changed him from boy to man.

As the Ormonds entered, they flashed looks of amazement at one another. Madeline's heart pounded as loudly as Katherine's, but it was not quickened by the same sentiments. She was even more jealous than angry. It was too bad of Miss McKnight; it was too bad of Jasper; the whole world was at fault in that that Hodgson creature should have been chosen to fill the post of honor rather than her own sylph-like self.

"Let us go to Mrs. Arnold," she said chokingly to her mother. "It is not necessary to speak to Miss McKnight at once."

"Very well, my pet," murmured Mrs. Ormond sympathetically.

The crowd in that portion of the room made it easy for their quartette to approach the receiving party at different points, and Katherine and Gilbert, with one mute look of mutual congratulation, found their way to the Wise Woman with all haste.

"At last, tardy ones!" was the latter's greeting. "Miss Laird, I am sure, is glad to see your face in a place of strangers."

Katherine took Marguerite's hand with a serious, sweet look, and, in defiance of all rules of etiquette, deliberately gave her her first kiss.

"Not half so glad as we are to see hers," she answered quietly.

Marguerite could not speak, and the revulsion of feeling she experienced might have been dangerous to her self-control had Gilbert not stood there, claiming her attention.

"I believe the last time I saw you, Miss Laird, you put on my hat for me," he said.

"I often put on hats for people," she answered, with the ghost of her mischievous smile.

Miss McKnight's alert eyes were studying the young man's face. Apparently satisfied with what she saw, she spoke authoritatively.

"Gilbert, I am going to give you the honor of making up Miss Laird's card."

"I shall dance with Fritz only, I think, to-night, dear Miss McKnight," said Marguerite, turning beseeching eyes upon her chaperone.

"Oh, now, we can't have that!" exclaimed Gilbert.

"Indeed we cannot," added Miss McKnight. "Go right about it, young man, and mind you select people who will make a good showing of Montaigne's terpsichorean abilities."

Marguerite felt crushed by a horrible prospect of unwilling, perfunctory partners, whose sisters would chaff them to-morrow.

"I feel ill," she murmured, "really."

The Wise Woman fixed her with her bright, steady gaze. "Look into my eyes. I don't think you know how attractive you are. You must not feel ill yet. An hour or two hence we will discuss it."

"I shall take two myself, if I may," said Gilbert, drawing his sister back again to make his remark.

Miss McKnight waved him off with her fan. "You have us quite at your mercy. Good evening, Mrs. Allington. Let me present to you my friend Miss Laird."

"Thunder!" groaned Gilbert, as they moved away. "Did you hear me talk shop to her the first thing I did?"

Katherine squeezed his arm excitedly. "You poor boy, you looked so crestfallen for a second; but did you ever see such a pair? The Wise Woman looks like a duchess, and I never saw a pictured princess who appeared more royal than Miss Laird; but she doesn't like that position. I can imagine she has suffered to-night, and I am so glad the dancing will begin before long."

"Do you think so?" indignantly. "The devil take the women!"

"Including your mother and sister?"

"What has become of them? I don't believe they have gone near her." Gilbert looked about wrathfully.

"Never mind. I don't worry much. One thing mother will never wittingly do, nor let Madeline do either, is to offend the Wise Woman."

"There they are, over there, I see a row of four swallow-tails, and probably Madeline is behind them. I will leave you with the mater,

Katherine, for I have my hands full. I wish I could take every one of her dances myself," added Gilbert.

"Mother would be so pleased!" returned his sister. "Be cool and sensible, as you always are, Gilbert. Remember, you are going to do your part now to make her a success. Even if you don't have one dance with her yourself, it is no matter."

"Indeed. Is that your idea? Strange how opinions differ, is n't it? I 'll have two dances with her, if it 's the last act. Mother, here is your other swan. Remember, you have the first with me, Katherine. *Au revoir*," and he departed swiftly.

"What is Gilbert's hurry?" asked Mrs. Ormond, who had been on the point of detaining him.

"Miss McKnight asked him to fill Miss Laird's card, so the double duty makes him busy."

Mrs. Ormond stared and then burst into a little laugh. "Katherine, I feel that I am growing hysterical. Is Edna McKnight in her dotage? What effrontery to press my children into her service! See Jasper towing that Sheldon about. What a bore for the poor boy! It is a wonder you are n't made to stand up there and hold my lady's train. I must say Edna is making the most of her little brief authority."

"Be very careful, mother," murmured Katherine. "You are excited, and you may say some-

thing to some one else that you will be sorry for to-morrow. Be prudent, dear. See how sweet Madeline looks; those men are almost quarreling for her dances."

In the midst of the girl's soothing words, Betty Arnold's brother Edward advanced and greeted Katherine and her mother.

"Do tell me," he said, "who is that stunning girl Miss McKnight just introduced me to? I think she said her name was Laird or Caird."

"Laird is the name," returned Katherine, pressing her foot against her mother's, for she felt her quivering to speak.

"Visiting the McKnights, I suppose," went on the young man. "I have long been wishing to call on Miss McKnight. I shall not put it off another twenty-four hours."

"No," replied Katherine; "Miss Laird has come to Montaigne to live, and Miss McKnight likes her very much, and is introducing her, as she lives alone here with her half-brother, Mr. Sheldon. He is over there with Dr. McKnight."

"Oho. Is that fellow with the biceps her brother? I've met him here at the gym. Well, she has a big brother, sure enough. I should n't want to offend her."

"You would like to dance with her, though, I'm sure. You know your dancing is n't offensive. Gilbert has her card. You will have to make love to him."

"Thanks awfully for the tip. I'll take yours

first, though, if I may. Are you going to let me have two? Mrs. Ormond, can't I have two?"

When the rather noisy young gentleman had withdrawn, Mrs. Ormond bent reproachful eyes on her elder daughter.

"I see you are determined to do all you can," she said.

Katherine gave her mother's hand a filial squeeze. "You have always been trying to instill into me what you call a little worldly wisdom," she answered. "Take a leaf out of your own book, and yield gracefully to the movement of the popular tide."

"I never asked you to help make the tide."

"Oh, I am the least influential of persons. Madeline, now, might head a faction against Marguerite; but would it be dignified, or redound to her credit? There is nothing to worry about, mother," added Katherine, who understood that it was Marguerite's beauty and temporary prominence which incensed Madeline and, through her, her mother. "People find their own level very soon. The Wise Woman cannot buoy up these friends any length of time. Just watch results; and meanwhile, mamma," Katherine looked at her mother coaxingly, "just suppose you and Madeline had left me, and Gilbert and I were alone in a strange town. Would you not be glad to have people kind to us? There is Mr. Sheldon going up to Madeline now." Katherine finished as quietly as she had begun; but her heart gave a queer

little jump. She hardly understood why her interest should be so vital that it annoyed her to have to turn to greet two men friends who approached and asked for her card.

They made it impossible for her to overlook the other interview.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPELL OF THE WALTZ.

THE little skirmish which had taken place over Madeline's programme before her admirers withdrew had restored something of that young lady's habitual complacence; and when Dr. McKnight approached and presented his companion, she beamed upon the latter with arch grace.

Jasper said something about the first dance, and then vanished, leaving Sheldon stranded near the siren who had once proved so dangerous to his peace.

"This is a brilliant sight," he said, in his slow, quiet speech. "I never saw so many diamonds together."

"There now," she replied, "you spoiled your remark by the addition. I am not wearing a single diamond. I thought you were complimenting the glitter of my silver."

Fritz paused, and scrutinized her prettiness. "You look like a mermaid," he said.

This declaration caused Madeline to flush violently. She expected that the chance simile would embarrass the speaker as well, or had he said it purposely? Had he never been able to forget

her? The thought was full of charm; for all his undesirable connections could not dim the fact that her companion was, so far as looks went, the finest man in the room.

"Poor little mermaid, so far from the sea!" she answered coquettishly.

"Have you been going down to Pokonet since the summer we were there together?" Sheldon's voice was so calm and friendly that Madeline heard it in surprise. How strange that he should mention the place to her.

"I have n't been there since," she replied, preferring to believe in his duplicity rather than to accept the unpalatable fact that he had not asked the Hodgsons about her. "Dear old Pokonet," she added pensively. "We can't feel quite the same about any other resort. Childish associations are so strong and sweet."

"I have a variety of associations with Pokonet," returned Fritz. The remark was all very well. It was the tone of it which displeased Madeline. "My childish ones cannot be so pleasant as yours. I was a very homesick boy, there."

"How about the later experiences?" questioned Madeline mentally, and she flung a quick glance at the speaker. He caught it in his strong gaze, and the unpleasant suspicion assailed her that he would be calmly willing she should look through the windows of his soul and see all that was there.

She took her determination quick. "I can-

not say that I have anything but childish associations with Pokonet," she said, with a careless shrug. "I fancied myself quite grown up that last summer I visited the place, but now I know what an irresponsible child I really was. Girls will be girls, and behave idiotically at times. I am sure I gave the Hodgsons a great deal of trouble, and you did not escape. I was n't always obedient to the bathing-master, as I recall those rather hazy experiences."

"Yes, I was sometimes afraid you would get in too deep."

No word of his own danger of getting in too deep. Madeline was justly indignant. How different these looks and words from the impassioned fragmentary ones which no subsequent love-making had been able to obliterate from her memory. Had she dreamed it that this cool, self-possessed man once turned red and white at her lightest speech, and was swayed by her glance in any direction she listed?

She was deeply piqued. "What a pity he does n't dance!" was her swift thought. "I shall not be able to meet him again to-night."

Then suddenly Gilbert approached, his eyes alight with interest. "Here, Sheldon, do you care anything about having a dance with your sister?" he asked briskly.

"Of cor I do. Is it time for me to go to her?" 'on turned to excuse himself from Madelin en Gilbert's hand fell on his arm.

"Not at all," he responded gayly. "I 'm your man. If you treat me with proper deference, I will let you have a dance."

Madeline stared, and Sheldon smiled. "You have my sister's card there? Why, that is very good of you. I suppose Rita is rather too busy to take care of it herself."

"Yes. To tell the truth, I have saved you two numbers. The first and last."

"I 'm sure you are very kind," answered Sheldon, more amused than Madeline by Gilbert's manner as he affixed his initials to the blank spaces. "I think I would better be getting my own card and writing down these important engagements," he added, and with a bow to Madeline, he turned away, without, she angrily considered, one word to beseech her to save him a dance.

"He will find out I am not so easily to be had when he wants me," she thought. "What are you doing with Miss Laird's card?" she asked aloud of her brother, who was absorbed in studying the same.

"I have filled it, at the Wise Woman's request. See here, Madeline. How 's this? Pretty good selection, is n't it?" Gilbert displayed the closely written pages which promised Miss Laird a busy night of it.

Madeline pushed away the autographs of her admirers with a decided movement. "What is it to me!" she said, so much fierceness in her low

tone that her brother stared at her with round eyes.

"Where 's your card, Maidie?" he asked, after a pause. "I 'm not down there yet."

"It is full."

"Oh, come now. Conventionality does n't go so far as to demand that a man shall believe that when his sister says it."

"Believe it or not, as you like."

"Don't be crusty," coaxingly. "It won't be any kind of an evening without a dance with you."

"How many have you taken with the milliner?"

"Two, but I want two with you. My card is n't anywhere near full."

"Mine is, I told you. Good-evening, Mr. Arnold. My card? Certainly, only don't take number ten. I am saving that for a rest."

"As if we did n't know what that means!" returned Arnold pensively. "I wish I were the man you are going to sit it out with."

"I will sit out your dance with pleasure, if you prefer."

"I don't like your sister's tone of alacrity, Ormond. Do you suppose she is reflecting on my dancing? I 'll tell you, Miss Madeline, let me have two, and we can sit out one of them."

"No, you can't have two," returned the little autocrat decidedly.

Arnold, with an ostentatious sigh, wrote his name on the card.

Gilbert bit his lip and regarded his sister. "Sure you are not saving number ten for me?" he asked briefly.

"Sure," she answered, and he turned on his heel. Number ten was a waltz, and Madeline had suddenly decided to save it for Fritz Sheldon; but it may as well be stated here that he never came for it.

Except for this blank, her card was full when Dr. McKnight approached and offered his arm.

"I have been so busy this evening, I have not looked after my own interests with my accustomed strict attention. Am I going to have your last dance?"

"I am afraid not," said Madeline, throwing a flattering tinge of regret into her tone.

"Nor a second one at all?"

"I 'm afraid not, unless I give you the number I have saved for a rest. Mother insists upon that. She keeps up the interesting little fiction that I am delicate. Nothing was ever more absurd."

"Your daughter is libeling you;" the doctor paused a moment to address Mrs. Ormond, as they passed her.

"I have n't a doubt of it," returned the mother, casting proud eyes on her youngest. "Jasper, I wonder what you will think of Katherine's dancing all the evening," she added anxiously. "I tell her I don't know about her filling her programme."

"I don't, either," said Katherine, with her merry glance. "It is n't full yet. I 'm about discouraged."

"Oh, I know, you are saving another for me. You are n't so cruel as your sister."

"No, I 'm never so cruel as Madeline at a dance. I have n't another for you, though. You need n't stop. I like variety in my partners."

"Then seeing there is n't a second chance for me, I will advise you not to dance every time, Miss Katherine. It would be a risk."

The couple moved on, and as they did so Madeline perceived Fritz Sheldon approaching her sister. Her interest was so great to know what they were going to say to each other that she could scarcely pay attention to her partner. She considered, however, that her mother would prove a trusty reporter.

Katherine looked up with a welcoming smile, and, in spite of Mrs. Ormond's haughty inclination of the head, the new-comer showed that he was pleased to discover friends.

"I suppose it is a late hour to ask to see a young lady's card," he said.

"Not too late for mine," replied Katherine brightly. She handed it to him as he spoke.

"Oh, you have three left," remarked Sheldon, as he examined it. "May I have one of them?"

"Certainly," replied Katherine, and her suspicious mother objected to her tone, and told her

next day that she might as well have ejaculated: "Do take all three!"

"You may have to excuse her when the time comes, Mr. Sheldon," said Mrs. Ormond, with impressive gravity. "My daughter's dancing through a long programme is an experiment."

"Of course," agreed the young man genially. "After all, the sociability of the occasion is the main point. If Miss Ormond will let me talk to her, I shall be satisfied."

"Has no idea of his place," thought Mrs. Ormond, irritated. "Does n't seem to have the least notion that chatting with Katherine is n't just as appropriate business for him as it is for Ed Arnold."

"You don't care for dancing, particularly, then," said Katherine, looking up at him and tapping one of her round arms with her downy fan. "He will probably tread on me," she thought, "but I don't care."

"Perhaps I do," Sheldon answered. "I have never had very much time to think about it. My sister is fond enough of it for the family. You know Marguerite is an enthusiast."

Mrs. Ormond cleared her throat. From her seat she could catch the fitful blaze of the Wise Woman's jewels, and the graceful lines of the white figure beside her.

"Your sister will be very tired to-morrow, I am sure. Fancy thinking of dancing after standing there so long," she said curtly.

"If any girl can endure it, Marguerite can," responded the brother, his grave face lighting with his slow, bright smile. "She is strong."

Mrs. Ormond distinguished her son's fair head as Gilbert hurried toward Miss McKnight.

"Here is your card, Miss Laird," he said. "I hope you will be pleased with the way I have carried out my very pleasant mission. You see your brother comes first, I second (that 's my perquisite, and there 's another one a little further down), and Dr. McKnight third."

"And I wish that was all, I assure you," returned Marguerite, faintly smiling. "I thank you though, sincerely, Mr. Ormond."

"Fie, don't say such crazy things, child; and, Gilbert, be careful you don't repeat nonsense! If Miss Laird feels as I do, I don't wonder she wants to get into some soft cushioned corner and rest; but exercise will rest her."

"We will sit out one of our dances, if you wish," Gilbert was saying when Madeline and Dr. McKnight approached, the former most reluctantly.

Miss McKnight's keen eyes were upon her, and she assumed an innocent expression.

"Good evening, Madeline; I have n't seen you before, you little wood nymph."

"I have," said Marguerite, and Madeline did not love her at the moment she touched her hand. Miss Laird instinctively knew Madeline to be one of her bitterest opponents. "From our place

here," she continued, "we overlook all the costumes in the hall; and the gown I selected as the prettiest any girl was wearing, I found adorned Miss Madeline Ormond, when you came a little nearer."

"It is very sweet of you to say so," returned Madeline, still leaning on Dr. McKnight's arm; and it was sweet of Marguerite, there is no doubt of that, but it was sincere, too, and if she had not looked so beautiful in her modesty and grace as she said it, Madeline could almost have liked her for it, especially as Dr. McKnight went on in his usual half-humorous, half-earnest fashion: —

"Oh, that is the usual thing, Miss Laird. Miss Madeline Ormond's costumes are not mere gowns, they are events."

"Your nephew always makes fun of me, Miss McKnight," pouted Madeline, wondering if the Wise Woman's splendid diamonds were her personal property, or family jewels which might be expected to revert to Jasper's wife.

"Too bad, too bad, dear," returned Miss McKnight, touching the girl under her chin with her fan.

The musicians modulated from the march they had been playing into the swaying rhythm of a waltz, and Fritz Sheldon crossed the hall toward his sister.

Marguerite, with much gay energy, had conducted dancing classes in the little flat each evening of the past week, and her brother had some of

their experiences in mind as he smilingly approached her now.

Marguerite could but marvel at his nonchalant expression, which betrayed so different a mental state from her own.

The muscles of her face felt stiff, and there was tension throughout her body

"Do you trust me?" asked Fritz, as he drew near. "My sister has been rubbing up my accomplishments," he added, addressing Miss McKnight.

"And to some purpose, I have no doubt," was the confident answer. "Brains tell, whether they are applied to dancing or to the perfecting of a steam gauge. Now school is out, Marguerite. Go and have a good time. Business before pleasure, but sometimes pleasure is business, remember."

Marguerite understood the significant gaze that accompanied these brisk words. She knew that the next grim duty was to enjoy herself; to be easily amused, and to amuse. It was no time yet for passivity.

She felt the truth of this, but oh, what rest it was to drop her hand upon Fritz's strong encircling arm, and be borne out upon the slippery floor without need for speech, the alien world obscured temporarily by a big broadcloth shoulder.

Sheldon's anxious responsibility in the novel business of guiding monopolized his attention, and

Marguerite rested, rested, to the sweep of the good music, floating hither and thither with the absence of effort belonging to a dancer both born and made.

"Hi, there!" exclaimed Sheldon once. "We nearly ran into Miss Madeline. She would n't have much chance if we should hit her." He laughed with some nervousness. "Say, Rita, how is this?" he added exultantly. "There is n't so much carnage as I expected, eh?"

"It is fine, Fritz," murmured the girl. "I wish I could dance with you all the evening."

"Pshaw! You don't either," was the delighted response. "I do seem to catch on, though, don't I?" he added, transported with the idea that the party was being a grand success. How jolly it was for Rita to get out of her rut! He did n't believe she had ever had such a good time in her life. "Oh! Did n't see them! Excuse me," he nodded toward Gilbert and Katherine, with whom he had collided sharply. "Eternal vigilance seems to be the price, et cetera," he added, as Gilbert nodded and smiled in return.

Marguerite slipped easily back into step with him after the jar, and did not attempt to raise her eyes above her temporary and blessed barricade.

"Who else have you on your card?" she asked.

"Nobody except Miss Ormond."

"Madeline?"

"No, the other. I relied on the reputation you

gave her for amiability, and went in. Wish now I had n't been such a modest violet. Ah there! Just missed those heavy weights. I 'm getting along all right. It is n't such a bore as I expected. You must look alive, and dodge, and it gives you something to think of."

This naïve tribute to the pleasures of the dance brought a smile to Marguerite's lips. "I hope you have several numbers with me then, at least," she said.

"Only one more. The last one."

"Fritz! Why, Fritz, how unkind!" She spoke with feeling.

"It 's just the violet business again," he replied, troubled. "Ormond said I could have two, and I took them. I wish now I had spoken a word for myself. The next time, Rita — *Look* out," but the threatening couple circled harmlessly by.

The next time! Marguerite groaned in spirit; but she would not look forward.

Too soon came the slight acceleration in the music which preluded the close of the dance.

Fritz did not guess the significance of the pressure which Marguerite gave his hand as the last chord sounded. He found her a seat and fanned her, justly proud of the way he had acquitted himself. Taking up her card, he ran his eye over its contents.

"Well, you won't have a chance to miss me," he remarked at last. "Ormond is next, and here he comes now. I can watch your good time even

if I 'm not in it. The only thing left for me to do is to bid you a long farewell. See here, Ormond, I was n't very bright to let you cut me off with a couple of my sister's dances."

"It will teach you to be more wide-awake next time," responded Gilbert cheerfully. "However, I think I treated you magnanimously. You can't expect to see much of Miss Laird this evening. There are plenty of other fellows' sisters here."

Marguerite was borne off with one yearning backward glance at Fritz, who stood and looked on admiringly as she and Gilbert glided in among the dancers.

"I wonder if I went as well as that," he thought. "No, I could n't be as indifferent to rocks ahead as Ormond. Wonder how he does it? Rita can dance, for a fact."

A smart bump and an injured glance from the couple who had encountered him reminded Fritz that he was cumbering the ground, and he withdrew to safer quarters.

Gilbert's bright friendliness caused Marguerite to feel pleasantly protected still.

"I shall live on the anticipation of our next," he said, when the dance was finished and he was wielding her fan. "If I had known all I do now, Miss Laird, it would n't have been safe to let me fill your card. Let me see, where do I come?" He lifted the dangling pasteboard and examined it. "McKnight is next, and the mischief of it is McKnight dances like a breeze. I don't think it

is according to the fitness of things for a sawbones to dance as well as he does. He will make you forget all about me."

"I enjoyed that very much," replied Marguerite, almost as loth to part with this frank flatterer as she had been with Fritz. Gilbert's eyes narrowed and twinkled something like Katherine's when he laughed, and she liked him.

"Then keep your memory green for me. Here comes McKnight, bad cess to him. Are n't you a little previous, Jasper?" asked Gilbert, looking determined not to yield his position.

Dr. McKnight smiled. "Your mother wishes to know if she can speak to you a moment before the next dance."

There was nothing for it but to go, so Gilbert reluctantly bowed himself away, and the doctor took the seat he had vacated.

"Aunt Edna wanted me to tell you that the last hand has been shaken, and that after this she can pursue her pleasant duties as chaperon. Do you see where she has taken her place?"

"And I can go to her between the dances?" said Marguerite eagerly.

"Yes, but pray don't look as if that were a more agreeable prospect than the dances themselves."

The girl just glanced at the speaker. He was the Wise Woman's nephew, but he was also Madeline Ormond's admirer, perhaps her lover.

"I believe you are one of the three people in

this hall to-night who understand my position," she said low and briefly. "I suppose you do not expect more of me than that I should seem to enjoy myself."

Dr. McKnight, conscious of having carefully and generously performed his part, had been feeling on very comfortable terms with himself and this handsome girl. Her words surprised him unpleasantly.

"I don't see why not," he answered. "No débutante whom I can remember has made as much of a sensation in Montaigne as you have to-night."

"Do you think I am a child to be pleased with an ambiguous speech like that?" she flashed out. "You are ingenious, but you are taking useless trouble." Suddenly her cold, haughty look was lost in a brave smile. "Pardon me. I did not mean to treat you to heroics. I shall not soon forget your kindness to my brother to-night. For him I am sure the Athletic Club ball is a grand success. He was much pleased to find how well he could dance with me. The floor and music are inspiring."

"I am glad they please you," replied Jasper, almost diffidently. "I hope they may betray you into actual enjoyment before the evening is over."

"I am in a new element, and I dread strangers," she said swiftly. "You, with whom in my life I may have exchanged half a dozen words, seem

comparatively an old friend. Does not that tell the story? But our dance will soon be over." Her little laugh had a note of bitterness. "Is it any wonder I go shuddering into the cold-water bath?"

Dr. McKnight's pulses moved faster. This queenly young creature, writhing in what to her pride was a false position, relied if ever so slightly upon him for support. He understood enough to perceive that she was at bay.

"After all," he said lightly, "you can fancy yourself at a college ball. There it is the custom for girls to dance with a lot of men they never saw before. You will find it not so bad, I prophesy. Nevertheless, I thank you for counting me out of the dreaded list. There is the music. Shall we begin before the floor is crowded?"

Many were the eyes that followed this couple as they glided forth in the waltz. All Marguerite's love of this poetry of motion rose in a tide which temporarily submerged her fears as she was lightly, firmly guided hither and thither in movements which naturally fitted her own.

For Jasper, he felt a certain exultation in leading this girl whose look a few moments ago had seemed to spurn him. It was in the nature of a triumph to find her so flexible and responsive to his guiding hand. Until the last note of the music, they floated on and on, and regret was in both their hearts when the clatter of voices superseded the rhythmic strains.

"That was perfect. Forgive me if I have tired you," he said.

She met his look frankly. "It rested me," she answered.

He took her to the seat Miss McKnight had reserved beside her.

That lady looked up with her piercing gaze. "You are a pretty doctor, Jasper. Don't you know plenty of children have died of skipping the rope? I am sure it is quite possible to die of dancing. You were both courting heart disease that time, I am sure of it."

Jasper laughed. "Where are those fine theories you bestowed on me lately at the office? What do you mean by putting such pictures into our fearless minds?"

"You are a perfect success, my dear," whispered Miss McKnight, pressing Marguerite's hand as the latter sank into the place beside her. "The women are all spiteful, and the men are enthusiastic."

The girl looked up, distressed. "No, no, I didn't mean anything that should trouble you. They are just spiteful enough to show which way the wind blows. If they were patronizing and kindly, we should have to up and take another."

"I 'll never take 'another,'" thought Marguerite, with vigorous protest; but, after all, the evening ended better than it had begun.

Jasper, after a few minutes' desultory talk, picked up her card. "Allington is the next lucky

man," he said. "I will let him know where you are."

Marguerite's heart sank within her as Dr. McKnight turned away; but presently he returned with her partner, whose quiet, courteous manners soon calmed her shrinking.

No healthy girl could have failed to yield to the pleasant exhilaration of the novel evening. After each dance she was restored to her chaperon, who received her with gracious attention as something precious. Each partner, before taking leave of her, brought and presented his successor, and the Wise Woman had an appropriate word for every one.

No wonder that by the time Fritz came to claim the last dance, he found a more lively companion than the one with whom he had enjoyed the first.

He looked into his sister's sparkling eyes with approval.

"You 've had a gay time, have n't you, Rita?"

Marguerite assented; but the next day she kept her bed. Every bone in her body ached, she admitted to Fritz, and he said she had danced too much.

She accepted his diagnosis in silence, but she knew that the reaction she was suffering was not from any physical strain.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTERTHOUGHTS.

"THERE is a point, Madeline, beyond which we should be in danger of making ourselves ridiculous. Remember that," said Mrs. Ormond.

They two were sitting alone at breakfast the morning after the ball. Katherine and Gilbert had taken an earlier meal in a most congenial and sympathetic frame of mind, enjoying their unhoped-for *solitude à deux* with the relish of a pair of successful conspirators.

"I think there is little danger of our being ridiculous," returned Madeline. She had the pale, disillusioned appearance which follows upon late and unsatisfactory hours.

"What a surprising and unsophisticated thing that was for Edna McKnight to do," went on Mrs. Ormond. "A strange freak to characterize her reappearance in society. Really, it suggests that very rough axiom that there is no fool like an old fool."

"How little you read her, mother," responded Madeline. "She never deserved better her title of Wise Woman than she did last night. Of course her effort might fail, may still fail; but

the boldness of the stroke may capture the success she wishes for her *protégée*, and no step less extreme would have accomplished it."

"But why should Miss McKnight take so much trouble — lay herself liable to criticism or ridicule? I am genuinely puzzled."

"What does she care for either criticism or ridicule?" rejoined Madeline. "She cares nothing for society. She has nothing to lose."

"Jasper has, then. Now what do you think, between ourselves, Jasper's attitude is toward his aunt's proceeding? Of course I saw that he cooperated with her to the extent of introducing Tom Sheldon" —

"Fritz Sheldon, please," interrupted the other, with a small, scornful smile. "We knew Tom Sheldon the chrysalis. The stately moth is called Fritz."

"I saw him singeing his wings at your candle, my dear; but you did n't dance with him. I am afraid you snubbed that aspiring individual."

"Not at all," returned the girl languidly, her color slowly rising.

"I was going to say that it is n't the part of wisdom to go to either extreme, and I hope you are not going to fall into error on one side while Katherine and Gilbert err in the opposite direction; for we might as well face the fact that Gilbert has, as you say, enrolled himself with Katherine under the Wise Woman's banner. Now, dear, I can see," Mrs. Ormond's voice took on a

coaxing tone, "that you are making yourself unhappy over this matter, and I must confess, since we are alone, that this fact puzzles me, too. What is it to you if Edna McKnight succeeds in placing her new favorites? You are like her in one respect. You cannot lose anything. Your position is secure."

Madeline did not respond at once. Since it was so hard to admit it to herself, she could not say to her doting mother that the atmosphere of last night's ball-room had been tangibly inimical to her girlish sovereignty. Fritz Sheldon had humbled her pride, she did not dream how unconsciously. Each one of her partners had sung Marguerite's praises with more or less excitement. The stranger's unheralded charms and her graceful dancing had manifestly captured the male element in Montaigne society, and to Madeline it was small comfort to recollect how little that made for Miss Laird's permanent social success. It was enough bitterness that the milliner had met her on her own ground, and borne away from her the palm as belle of the evening. Mrs. Ormond's fond eyes had not perceived this fact, for Madeline had been, as usual, always on the floor and well attended, but the girl herself knew it, and suffered throughout her vanity-bound nature. Nothing less than supremacy satisfied her.

"I am too tired to care to talk about it, mother," she answered.

Mrs. Ormond regarded the feverish lips with

some anxiety. "You must sleep this afternoon, if possible," she said. "I detest this turning night into day. Ten o'clock is too late to begin dancing. In a little place like Montaigne, we ought to be able to regulate these things. You look as if you would be a subject for a visit from Dr. McKnight, if we are not careful."

"A professional visit?" asked Madeline, her eyebrows raised. "Thank you. Do you suppose I would put out my tongue at Jasper?"

Her mother looked away from the quizzical eyes. "I don't know who should help him along, if not his friends," she said.

Madeline smiled scoffingly. "You are philanthropic, I know, but I think we need n't feel called upon to help drive the wolf from Jasper's door. There are a number of other women who are doing it. I draw the line at that."

"I could not avoid his care of Katherine," said Mrs. Ormond defensively.

"I know you could n't, but acute illnesses are different. However, I 'm not going to need any physician, so do not let us discuss it. I could quarrel with my best friend this morning."

"You have n't answered my question how Jasper stands disposed toward his aunt's performance."

Madeline shrugged her shoulders. "How can I tell?"

"You can tell what he said about it, I suppose."

Mrs. Ormond spoke with some asperity. She

was tired, too, and this was the branch of the subject in which she felt most interest.

Madeline pushed her chair back from the table. "During the first dance of the evening he spoke of Miss Laird, said she had a good deal of style, and that he hoped for her sake she was accustomed to dancing."

"Yes. Well?"

"The next time I met him the evening was half over. He did not mention the milliner." The girl rose from the table. "If you can make anything of that, you are welcome to."

Madeline herself had made enough of it to add several dark shades to the evening's dissatisfaction.

"They went well together. I watched them," said Mrs. Ormond musingly, "but every girl appears at her best when she is dancing with Jasper. I suppose he knows how to adapt himself. That Sheldon got along very well. I wondered why he didn't dance more. He" —

"Lazy folks, lazy folks," exclaimed Katherine, coming into the room and limping ostentatiously around the table to her mother for the purpose of implanting a hearty kiss on her cheek.

"Katherine Ormond, it was too much for your foot!" ejaculated the latter. "Now you listen to me: you will wear an elastic stocking after this. Don't say one word" —

"Mother, I can glide like a swan, if I want to. It is only in the sweet, unrestraining influence of

home that I go like the swan on land. My ankle is the least bit weak this morning."

"It was all wrong, your dancing those two numbers in succession with that big Sheldon. I frowned at you; you must have seen me."

"I did see you, honey, and it spoiled your beauty so, I would n't call Mr. Sheldon's attention to it; and I went on dancing as the lesser evil. It did n't tire my ankle any more because he was big, you know, dear, so long as he did n't step on me, and really he dances well."

"Oh, you would dance with a porpoise, and think he was graceful, if he only had flopped out of the sea at Pokonet!"

"Mother!" exclaimed the girl, in a sad, reproachful tone which her eyes belied. "I leave it to Madeline if Mr. Sheldon did n't cover himself with glory."

Madeline lifted a languid hand and patted a long-drawn yawn. "I did n't watch him," she answered; and that was the first fib she had told that morning.

Mrs. Ormond regarded Katherine. "The next thing we have to look for is to see whether, after all this, Miss Laird is received in Montaigne on a social basis."

"Yes. Tell me, mother," said Katherine, with unexpected seriousness, "which result of the Wise Woman's kindness would please you best?"

"What do you mean?" hesitated Mrs. Ormond lamely, with a glance toward Madeline, who stood leaning on a chair-back.

"I mean to find out whether you would be glad if none of our set called upon her, or invited her and Mr. Sheldon to their homes."

Mrs. Ormond's lips parted, but no sound issued. She cast a second glance at her younger daughter, whose face was inscrutable in its weariness.

"Why do you wish to know?" asked the mother at last, turning upon Katherine a look dignifiedly defiant.

"For several reasons. One is that Gilbert is going to call upon them, and I should like to go with him."

"Oh, Gilbert is going?"

"Yes." The ghost of a smile played about Katherine's lips. "How much longer will it be necessary to wait to find out what other people are going to do? Is Miss McKnight's public seal of approval sufficient to make you willing that I should follow my inclination?"

"I don't know that it is such a serious matter," said Mrs. Ormond, a trifle ashamed.

"No," returned Katherine. "The only phase of the affair which might become serious is the humorous side of it. Miss McKnight says Miss Laird is charming. Mr. Ben Allington said to me last night that Miss Laird was charming, 'an acquisition to our circle — ah!'" Katherine could no more help quoting this important authority with his own impressive tone and manner than she could help breathing.

"Did Ben Allington say that?"

"Yes. Now, if we are not with the tide as it turns, we shall be laughed at; for it is rumored that Gilbert and Mr. Sheldon were boy friends, and that we have spent our summers with their relatives. People will say we are afraid, or snobbish, or think some other true and unpleasant things about us."

"You know I said so, Madeline," remarked Mrs. Ormond, quick to take alarm.

"Madeline and I are rather popular, and Miss Laird is handsome. Just because of that it would be policy, good policy, for us to be among the first to show her some little attention. Yes, you think I have an axe to grind, of course, Madeline. Take your own way, but remember my prophecy when some day the girls look at you curiously, and wonder how Madeline Ormond takes it."

Katherine herself had not suspected how straight this shaft would fly home. She might have seen her sister wince had she looked, but, dropping her serious manner, she rose. "Well, I must go. I have my Carlyle to read up. Don't criticise my gait. Remember the swan is an amphibious creature," and she limped from the room, leaving Madeline with new food for reflection.

Second sight would have shown the latter a prostrate foe. Marguerite lay in bed that morning, restlessly going over in her mind the events of the night before. She had never felt such fatigue as now possessed her, but her mind was especially alert, and showed her as in a magic

mirror every look, smile, and word which had evidenced the curiosity, friendship, hauteur, antagonism, or admiration shown her at the ball. Her thoughts dwelt with no satisfaction on the courtesy and compliment showered upon her by her partners. That had been exhilarating for the moment, but now she brushed it aside as immaterial. Considerations of the attitude of her own sex absorbed her.

The morning had passed, and afternoon was waning when Lucia came to Marguerite's room and announced that Miss McKnight was in the parlor.

"I told her you were in bed, and she said she would be glad if you would allow her to come and see you a minute."

"Certainly she can come in," said Marguerite, after a moment's hesitation; and presently the visitor made her appearance.

She came up to the bed, and, taking the girl's hand between her gloved ones, looked down at her in smiling silence.

"I am very much ashamed," said Marguerite, returning her gaze.

"Am *I?* That is the question. Is a visit an intrusion?"

"Not from you, dear Wise Woman. I like that name for you. I think last night may have been the exception in your conduct that proves the rule, but all the same it bolsters me up and heals my snubs to say to myself, 'the Wise Woman ordered it.'"

"Then I will sit down," said Miss McKnight, drawing a chair near the bed, and slipping back her furs; "but it is news to me that you have any snubs to heal." She regarded the girl with a pleasantly argumentative expression.

Marguerite moved in a little reminiscent shudder. "I admit that I was Argus-eyed, and on the watch for cold looks and shades of tone."

Miss McKnight's look grew kinder, and her low laugh had a mirthful sound which made her companion's color rise. "You had a chip on that lovely shoulder of yours, my dear. A thicker-skinned girl would probably have felt nothing disagreeable."

Marguerite bit her lip, and then she too laughed. It is a short step from the tragic to the comic, and with her laughter, tears gathered in the girl's eyes. "There is something so ridiculous in my lying here completely fagged out by nervous tension in such a cause. If I were given to that sort of thing, I could indulge in a fit of hysterics over the absurdity of it all." She wiped her eyes.

"You are a plucky creature, and I am proud of you," said Miss McKnight. "How did Fritz enjoy himself?"

"Very much, apparently. However, his principal pleasure was in the thought of giving me such a good time." Marguerite threw a glance at her visitor, and again wiped away a few tears. "Oh, don't laugh at me, please;" and then she broke down and wept a little, quietly, into her handkerchief.

"That 's right," said the Wise Woman, patting her soothingly. "Let those tired nerves cry awhile. It is a poor rule that won't work both ways, and it is as invigorating sometimes to let salt water out as it is at other times to rub it in. I am sorry for you, and yet I 'm glad, too. The situation is entirely redeemed from absurdity by your aim in this matter, and if last night's experiences do not appear to me in the same light that they do to you, it is not because I cannot look at them from your point of view. Fashionable society takes itself and its little games so seriously that I cannot help being amused by it. In children's plays, it is a dreadful slight upon a child if he is never called upon to be ' it.' So society people jostle each other, each eager for his turn to be *it*, and I have reached the age where, as a spectator of the game, I do not miss any of its entertaining points. I was even called upon to be ' it ' myself last night, and so I offered to my acquaintances a young aspirant for society honors who played her part so well that she has nothing to regret, whether she is included in future games or not. Marguerite," the Wise Woman's voice took on an impressive tone, "I am well satisfied; very well. I think you may put aside all fears of hampering your brother, and it would not surprise me in the least if you helped him, — yes, in this very line."

Marguerite had dropped her handkerchief, and was regarding her visitor wistfully. "If I do,"

she answered, "I shall owe it to you entirely, and I can never thank you; that is the worst of it."

Miss McKnight's carriage stopped at the Ormonds' on her way home.

She found mother and daughters in their sitting-room, working and reading.

"I thought I would stop and see how the ankle stood it," she said, as the three cordially greeted her.

"Jasper warned her," returned Mrs. Ormond sorrowfully, "but she would dance too much!"

"Oh, a day or two's rest and some arnica will make me all right again," continued Katherine. "How nice you were to come and talk it over. Let me take your cloak. Was n't it a success?"

"I believe it was," replied Miss McKnight, accepting the chair Katherine drew forward. "I shall sympathize with notables after this, though. When I had shaken hands for an hour, I could have favored the Indians' mode of salutation; rubbing noses, is n't it?"

"I should think the girls who received, and then danced, would be tired to death to-day," remarked Madeline.

"I am sure one of them is," returned the visitor promptly. "I have just left Miss Laird. I thought the least I could do was to go and see if she had become crippled in my service."

"How was she?" asked Madeline, striving to keep all constraint out of her voice.

"Used up." Miss McKnight smiled.

"I suppose so," returned Madeline. "Her work has always kept her sitting."

"I hope it will keep her sitting a little, still," returned the other cheerily. "As I said, I do not propose to let her off."

"She will find it difficult," said Madeline, "to go into society and work too."

"What an idea," laughed Katherine. "Do we sit with our hands folded all the time we are at home?"

"I think if she keeps enough going for fancy work she can accomplish it," said Miss McKnight, with such natural good-humor that even the watchful Madeline accepted her sincerity. "However, I am well aware we must n't count upon her. That devoted brother of hers would spread a carpet of rose leaves for her to walk on, if he thought it would add to her happiness. He kept rather quiet last night. He told me it was diffidence, but that he should not err again. His experience with his sister and Katherine has given him an exalted idea of his own abilities. Did n't you like him, Katherine?" turning suddenly toward her favorite.

"Yes. He is the sort of man you feel from the first that you have known always. He does n't make conversation. He is just friendly and easy."

"One of the 'real folks.' Yes. He has n't any littlenesses. He is a big, manly man, without any self-consciousness. I like Fritz."

Madeline took note of the familiar use of the name.

"I wonder if he can play cards," she said carelessly. "I am considering giving a progressive euchre party, and I thought of asking Miss Laird and her brother."

Katherine's eyes grew too wide to twinkle. Mrs. Ormond's face betrayed relief in its surprise, and the Wise Woman's chair rocked a trifle faster.

"No doubt they can both play," she said. "A good idea, Madeline. I believe I will give a card party of some sort, too; but after you is manners for me."

CHAPTER XVI.

SPRINGTIME.

THE rain was slanting landward, and miles of breakers were driven roaring before the gale, when Katherine Ormond next saw Pokonet.

She did not arrive unexpectedly this time, and Mr. Hodgson delivered her up triumphantly from his covered wagon at the back door of the farm-house. The front door was not opened to a searching wind like this.

"Here 's Kittiwake, Ma," he roared genially, and Mrs. Hodgson appeared.

"Was n't it a shame to bring the horse out such a day?" exclaimed the girl. "You will change my name to Stormy Petrel, if I appear to you in any more tempests. I did n't know the weather was going to behave so. It is totally different in New York. I 'm too wet to touch you, Mrs. Hodgson, but it is only my mackintosh."

"Here, drop it right off in the kitchen, dear."

"I feel guilty to bring Mr. Hodgson out in the storm, and make him so much trouble."

"Well, you need n't, child. He 'd cheerfully go through it a dozen times for a visit from you."

"You are so good to me, both of you; but this time it is n't pleasure, you know, that brings me. Being sent on business makes me feel very important and dutiful; it is different from the stolen fruit sensation I had last time."

Mrs. Hodgson conducted her guest into the living-room, where Mr. Hodgson soon joined them. The cheerful fire in the open stove was as grateful on this spring day as in that November when Katherine last saw it.

"How 's the winter used ye, Kitty?" asked the old man, regarding her with kindly scrutiny. "Ye look a little grain like a hot-house posy, seems like."

"Yes, I begin always at this time of year to need being put out to grass."

"That 's what you do need," said Mrs. Hodgson sympathetically, "and not to go on dissipatin' all summer. I think your mother ought to give you your way this year and let us have you, just like old times."

Katherine regarded her hostess curiously, and smiled. "Mrs. Hodgson, I wrote you that I was going to surprise you, and I am. Are you feeling well this spring? Do say you are particularly well, you and Mr. Hodgson both!"

"We 're in very good case," returned Mrs. Hodgson, reflecting the girl's smile. "Why?"

"Because I am coming to Pokonet for my outing. I 'm not going anywhere else."

"That 's clever, that 's good," answered both

host and hostess heartily; "but I don't see what that 's got to do with our bein' well," added Mrs. Hodgson. "If I was n't well, I 'd want you all the more, Kitty."

"But," answered the girl impressively, waving her hand toward the window, "in Pokonet it never rains but it pours, you ought to know that." Her words were accompanied by the crackling of pelting drops on the pane. "Almost everybody else in Montaigne wants to come, too."

"They do, hey?" remarked Mr. Hodgson, always the readier of speech of the pair. "Well, I always said there warn't any reason why Pokonet should n't be 's fashionable as Southampton over yonder. We 've got a better beach to-day. I tell ye our land 's goin' to rise, Ma, and we 'll give Kittiwake a slice off the south end there for a weddin' present."

"How you talk, Pa!" said Mrs. Hodgson. "Tell us what you mean, Kitty."

"I will. That is what I came for. Mother has been taking all sorts of liberties with your house; but as she has done it only in her mind, I suppose it was no harm."

"That 's it, Kitty, — pleases her, and don't hurt us, as the old sayin' is."

"Wait up, Pa." Mrs. Hodgson lifted a repressive hand.

"First of all," began Katherine, "I don't know whether Maguerite Laird has written you that we have seen a good deal of each other this winter."

"Rita don't write a great deal, but she 's spoken of you a number of times. It pleased us more 'n a little to think she and Tom — Fritz, she calls him — had got acquainted with you and your folks. I did n't know, not till you 'd gone home last fall, that they 'd moved to Montaigne. Rita was so busy she never wrote to us for weeks together."

"No? Well, I have another dear friend in Montaigne, an elderly lady by the name of McKnight. She has been very good to Marguerite."

"Yes. I 've heard tell of her."

"She heard us talking one day about Pokonet, and I — perhaps I was a little enthusiastic telling Marguerite more than she knew about the place, and Miss McKnight said this was just the sort of resort she had been wishing to hear of. She lives with a nephew who is a doctor, and she wants to find some place near New York where they can spend their vacation together. The next thing, I told mother that Miss McKnight's heart was set on coming to Pokonet, and then she began to consider that *we* had better come too. I did n't discourage her."

"She thinks a great deal of this Miss McKnight, I suppose, then."

Katherine looked into the fire. "Yes, Miss McKnight's movements are quite important to her. Now you see, Mrs. Hodgson, how we have been taking liberties with your house; apportioning the rooms to these people."

"Did ye make 'em go 'round?" asked the old man, much interested.

"Pretty well. It required some management."

"Too much, I guess, Kitty," said Mrs. Hodgson. "Let 's see. There 's your mother and you and Maidie and Gilly, that 's four. Then Miss McKnight and her young man is six, and Rita and Tom is eight, — I want them free to come; and Pa and I are ten."

"Of course you would have to have plenty of help," said Katherine, "and the guests would not all be here all the time. I am probably the only one you would never get rid of."

"We could n't make so many real comfortable," returned Mrs. Hodgson. "I guess I could find a place near by for the McKnights, and then manage the rest. I don't know but I 'd like an old-time summer," she added musingly.

"I hoped you would feel that way," returned Katherine, looking relieved.

"Tell us about the children," said Mr. Hodgson, — "about Tom and Rita. Tom 's doin' well, I take it."

"Very. It would delight you to hear how well he stands with the proprietor of the Works. Mr. McKnight is the brother of the lady we were talking of. As for Marguerite, she is one of my best friends."

"Well now, I 'm glad," said Mrs. Hodgson, much gratified. "She 's a real smart girl. I could see that right off. She wrote me she was n't

doin' so much business as she did one time there; but I guess Tom don't want her to work too hard."

"He does n't want her to work at all; but she likes to, and the Montaigne ladies can't bear to give up her taste and cleverness. She has been going out a good deal, and that makes a woman less able to keep up a business. She and her brother belong to the same whist club that I do, and we often attend the same social festivities."

"Yes?" returned Mrs. Hodgson, to whom this state of things seemed very natural, if not very desirable. "I hope she won't go too much. As you say, that ain't good for trade."

Katherine smiled confidentially at the fire. "No, that is n't good for trade," she answered.

The direction in which events had shaped themselves was as pleasant as it was unexpected to Katherine. That her mother and Madeline should come to take a docile view of spending another summer in the quiet surroundings of Pokonet was something she would have considered it useless to hope for; but without a word of urging on her part, the wonder had come about.

"I think it would n't be a bad idea to go again," Madeline had replied, when her mother first made the suggestion. "It is n't as if we should be tied there for the whole summer. We can accept invitations occasionally, perhaps;" and so Katherine had been sent, a willing messenger, to the Hodgsons', to make arrangements. She was re-

ceived, when she returned to Montaigne, with less indifference than on the occasion of her last home-coming.

Mrs. Ormond and Madeline listened with some dissatisfaction to the result of her visit.

"I don't think you managed very well, Katherine. According to my plan, there was plenty of room for the McKnights," said Mrs. Ormond.

"Yes; but we did n't count in Marguerite and Mr. Sheldon," rejoined the girl.

The others looked blank.

"I did n't know they were going," said Madeline.

Mrs. Ormond gave a little laugh. "What an extraordinary talent for getting in our way those young people have shown."

"I dare say Mr. Sheldon can't have very much time to himself," said Katherine, "but it is natural that the Hodgsons should wish to keep a place open for them. It is a wonder we did n't calculate clearly on that. For my own part, I don't think I used my brains at all. We were going to Pokonet, and prosaic details, such as sleeping and eating, did n't trouble me much; but it is all right, mother. Mrs. Hodgson will find the McKnights a place at the Tysons' or the Berrys'. What is the difference, — I mean for people who don't know and love the Hodgsons?"

"I suppose it will have to do," returned Mrs. Ormond.

"I will go and see the Wise Woman, and tell her about it," said Katherine.

"No, you had better take a rest," objected the mother.

"I am never too tired to go there," said Katherine.

"Never mind. I prefer to go this time. I will take Miss McKnight your love, and tell her all about it."

Mrs. Ormond immediately donned her outside garments and set forth. When she was ushered into the Wise Woman's sanctum, she found Miss Laird with her.

"What a charming day," said the visitor, as she greeted them. "The tender green of the trees in the park, and the bluebirds and robins, make me feel that summer will be here before we know it. Ah, Edna, your home is always too lovely to leave."

"Jersey air is Jersey air even in the park," rejoined her friend. "When the mosquitoes begin their siege, and the air seems to percolate feebly through invisible down that clings about one's head, even my inertia is overcome. And any way, I have the Pokonet fever, and must find out if *similar similibus*, etc., will work in this case. When do you expect Katherine?"

"She has come; and she brings tolerably satisfactory word. I did not know before, Miss Laird, that you and your brother propose spending the summer with your uncle."

"Oh, no such luck!" answered the girl. "Of course Fritz will get some vacation."

"And you will spend it there?"

"Certainly. Uncle Silas and aunt Althea consider that an understood thing."

Mrs. Ormond regarded her a moment with a conventionally bland expression, and then turned to Miss McKnight.

"For that reason," she said, "Katherine found she could not get the rooms in Mrs. Hodgson's house which she hoped for, for you."

"Oh, that must n't be!" exclaimed Marguerite in a different tone. "I am sure we can make some arrangement. Fritz and I can go early or late in the season. We must n't interfere with you, Miss McKnight."

"Don't worry, my dear," returned the latter placidly. "Are n't there some neighbors about this charmed Hodgson house? What did Katherine say?"

"She spoke of neighbors," returned Mrs. Ormond reluctantly, "but if Miss Laird thinks she could arrange her dates — Katherine's pleasure would be so enhanced, to say nothing of Madeline's and my own, by having you with us."

"We can; I will speak to Fritz," began Marguerite eagerly.

"Not a bit of it, not a bit of it," said Miss McKnight quietly, with a little calming gesture. "Of course the good aunt and uncle want you and your brother to have a place to retreat to. You have n't spent a summer yet in Montaigne, and you don't know what it is like. Katherine and

the Hodgsons and I shall succeed in making some pleasant plan, I am sure."

So Mrs. Ormond failed in one of the intentions of her visit, for Miss McKnight showed herself immovably set against supplanting Marguerite and Fritz; but she had succeeded in the other, namely, the determination to discover whether this disappointment would cause Miss McKnight to waver in her plan for going to Pokonet. Mrs. Ormond did not intend to immure herself and Madeline in an uncongenial spot to no purpose.

She sighed, as she left the blossoming park, over the obstinate and inconvenient fact of the existence in her world of these young relatives of the Hodgsons. Not all the winter's social experience, in which they had held a modest but pleasant place, had succeeded in reconciling her to them. Had their home been out West, down South, or in the East, how her kindly feelings could flow out toward them!

Marguerite's intuition was too keen not to discern Mrs. Ormond's real attitude, under all the suavity with which that lady learned to treat her when their paths crossed. Still, the girl did not allow herself to attach much weight to the circumstance. She took the liberty privately of being amused by Mrs. Ormond.

"She is n't exactly a mother. She is a manager," she said once to Fritz, and he gave her some careless reply. It penetrated to his consciousness occasionally that Mrs. Ormond seemed

a cold sort of woman, but the fact had no personal bearing for him. Neither did the opposite fact of Madeline's cordiality affect him more deeply. The girls in Montaigne were very pleasant, the Ormonds especially; but he was absorbed this winter in his work.

Marguerite's happiness was serene in these days. She often made hats in her quiet workroom, but she received social calls in her pretty parlor, and was smiled upon. The Wise Woman's strong influence was constantly backing her, and Katherine's *penchant* was no longer quarreled with. Gilbert was almost as frequent a visitor at the flat as his sister, and terms of pleasant familiarity soon flourished among the four young people.

Madeline could not resist an occasional sneer.

"I suppose you are charmed that there is a prospect that your most cherished friends will not have to be parted from you long at a time this summer," she said to Katherine, on the evening after the latter's return from Pokonet.

"To whom do you refer, sister?" inquired the other.

"To those members of the nobility over on Main Street."

"Don't class Sir Thomas Sheldon second under the head of my cherished friends," said Katherine. "He is an insensible machinist. You practiced your charms upon him just in time, Madeline."

The latter bridled significantly. With fatuous vanity her imagination returned from every rebuff of cold facts to the idea that her fascinations were still potent with this old admirer. She told herself that he was a capital actor, and that painful experience had made him cautious. That was all his indifference meant.

"I am sure he is quite as friendly with you as is necessary," answered Madeline.

"Do you really think so? Well, perhaps you are right; but when one beams upon a man with gracious advances one minute and withdraws from him in cold reserve the next, regards him coyly from behind a fan or chatters at him like a magpie at one meeting, then maintains a demure silence at the next, it is n't very flattering to have each of these attitudes received with exactly the same benevolent abstraction, and discover that he has been thinking about steam pipes all the time. No, I repel the insinuation that the great Fritz is one of my cherished friends. I am not going to do *all* the cherishing!"

Madeline regarded the speaker half wistfully. "I think you have the happiest disposition I ever knew, Katherine. If a man really treated you as you describe, you would n't mind it."

"If, skeptic? I tell you he does. If Mr. Sheldon could unscrew my ear and take it off and tinker it and make it hear better, then put it back again, he would take some interest in me. As it is, I am an unimportant incident, and so are you,

and so is Betty, and so are all the rest of the girls."

"Speak for yourself," said Madeline tartly. "I don't think Mr. Sheldon ventures to regard me as an incident."

"Really?" responded Katherine, with curious interest. "Does n't he draw queer things on paper, things with — with valves, and show them to you?"

"Indeed he does n't!" answered Madeline loftily, and she spoke truly. Fritz never made demands upon her sympathy. "You certainly have the happiest disposition I ever knew," added the girl fretfully. "I believe, after all, you enjoy life much better than I do." She regarded Katherine as if surprised at such presumption.

"It does n't need to be so," rejoined the latter cheerfully. "We have very much the same opportunities, with the balance rather in your favor."

Of course the balance was in Madeline's favor. She knew it, and considered that the fact was no more than right. Then why should Katherine be gay, when she herself did not feel at all so? She attempted to analyze her dissatisfaction with life. With herself she was inclined to be frank, and her search revealed to her two crumpled rose leaves. One was Fritz Sheldon's apparent indifference when she would have liked him to exhibit his positive devotion, the other was a doubt, tiny and irritating, as to whether Jasper McKnight's allegiance were quite as strong now as in days

gone by. To be sure, his profession occupied him more and more, yet a man can find time for what he most desires. Madeline had for a long time dallied nonchalantly with the thought that Dr. McKnight was perhaps the most suitable man of her circle to claim the honor of her hand. Of late she had grown so certain of it that she began to look with interest for the decisive proposition. That it had not yet been made was, she knew, a fact against which her mother chafed.

But Pokonet was coming — and leisure. Given the beach at Pokonet and idleness — Madeline looked into her mirror, and as she prepared to brush her pretty hair, her lips took on a more complacent curve.

CHAPTER XVII.

POKONET.

"POKONET in daisy time," said Katherine, her hands clasped behind her head, as she lay in a hammock on the side piazza of the Hodgsons' house, "Pokonet in daisy time is" — She paused for a simile.

"Is Pokonet in lazy time," suggested Madeliné, who was equally idle in a neighboring deck-chair.

This piazza was no original part of the gray old farmhouse, but had been added a few years ago in the interests of that leisurely class of humanity known as summer boarders.

Katherine glanced at her sister. "I thought, when we first came down, of announcing to you that whenever you spoke derogatorily of Pokonet I should rise in my dignity and leave the room; but I think I was scared before I was hurt. You are glad to be here."

"Of course," answered Madeline "else why should I have come?"

"It is exactly what you need," said Katherine.

"Why do you stare at me so? I know I am pale and ugly, but you need n't emphasize the fact."

"You look tired, and this crisp air and the long, still nights will make you over sooner than anything else."

"You are none too blooming yourself."

"True for you; but I should never think of calling myself pale and ugly! I prefer Mr. Hodgson's simile. He says I look like a hot-house posy. Now I call that real gallantry; but we shall soon look alive, both of us, planted as we are at last in the open air." Katherine gazed off across the wide field, billowy with daisies, to where the flowing outlines of the sand dunes hid and revealed the vivid blue of the ocean. "The saltness in this air is the savor that makes life best worth having," she went on. "These brave, tall, storm-beaten ailanthus-trees are the dearest in all the world, and their robins are the most tuneful and trustful. I begin to feel sleepy with their last soliloquy at sunset, and I like to think how close they are to the head of my bed. It would be sheer folly to maintain that there is any other such place to sleep as this. I know Morpheus has his headquarters right in this old house."

"That is the trouble," returned Madeline. "Now if he would only go to the city by day like the other men" —

"Tut, tut," interrupted Katherine warningly. "I want to be a poet," she went on dreamily, "and write a poem so descriptive of evening and night in Pokonet that it shall be a specific against

insomnia, and so benefit mankind. I would tell of the hush that falls so gradually with twilight and darkness. Not a creature moving except the birds twittering sleepily as they search the branches for the most comfortable positions, and the fireflies that flit silently about the fields with their lanterns, to make sure that every flower has his eye shut. The ocean's surge is softened by quarter of a mile's distance to the rhythmic breathing of a sleeping giant, and as you listen it grows fainter, until at last the very branches cease to murmur, and sleep overtakes you: ten hours of dreamless rest, from which you slip back to life in a new birth, deliciously free from all sensations save that of hunger."

"Bravo! Glad I came!" said a voice, and Fritz Sheldon pushed open the screen door and stepped laughingly out upon the piazza.

"I sha'n't get up," said Katherine, not changing her position, as she smiled at him with flushing cheeks. "If you had announced yourself properly, sent your card out here and followed it at a decorous distance, we should both have been very happy to see you. As it is, you eavesdropped shamefully, and if you had waited a little longer would probably have proved the proverb and heard nothing good of yourself."

"I didn't dare to wait any longer. You were so graphic that I found myself on the point of snoring, and was relieved when you removed the spell and waked me up with a sensation of hun-

ger. I assure you, the first whiff of this air has given it to me."

"You were n't expected, were you?" asked Madeline, who had half started up to greet the new-comer, and now sank back in her seat, while Sheldon took a rocking-chair opposite.

"No; but my aunt and uncle cannot be half so much surprised at my being here as I am myself. It hinges upon the very fact your sister was just emphasizing, namely, the soporific qualities of Pokonet. Mr. McKnight came down to spend last Sunday with his sister, and he says his has been a wasted life because he did n't realize before that Arcadia was cheek by jowl with New York city. He slept like a top here, — a humming-top, probably; his build suggests vocal slumber, — and he is planning that we shall do some of our work in Pokonet. That suits me, you know." Fritz smiled in his contentment.

"I suppose Marguerite came with you," said Katherine, recovering from her temporary embarrassment, and starting to leave the hammock.

"No, lie still. Marguerite will follow to-morrow or next day. We were both unprepared for my coming so early, and she has some arrangements to make before leaving the flat, and some planning to attend to for the summer comfort of Lucia and her family. Mr. McKnight wanted me to come down with him this afternoon."

Madeline's face was no longer listless. An Adamless Eden had not been to her mind.

"I suppose we shall see nothing of you," she said, half pouting.

"That depends upon whether Mr. McKnight's genius for hard work becomes more fitful down here. Oh, yes, I expect to get more of a vacation than I hoped for by this pleasant vagary of his. How does the Wise Woman like it?"

"How can you ask!" returned Katherine. "Is n't she a Wise Woman? She wants her doctor now."

"I hope he can soon come. I saw him last night, and he said he was only waiting for Dr. Granbury's return. Ah, there is your mother;" he rose as Mrs. Ormond deliberately emerged from the screen door, her face indicating her surprise. "How do you do, Mrs. Ormond. You see delegates from Montaigne are still arriving. It is better for us to come while we can do so of our own accord, with some show of dignity. The chances are good for melting and running down here pretty soon. Jersey thermometers are climbing."

Mrs. Ormond responded to this cheerful address as well as her unprepared condition would allow.

Gilbert had confided to Katherine that their mother's regard for Fritz and his sister still shared somewhat those sentiments with which the devil is said to regard holy water.

"Miss Marguerite is n't with you?" asked Mrs. Ormond, casting a suspicious glance around.

"No. She will follow shortly. Take this chair, Mrs. Ormond."

"Ah, I wish my poor boy could get away," said the lady, as she accepted the attention. Fritz must have been callous indeed if he did not perceive that his presence, under the circumstances, was an injury. Mrs. Ormond sighed. "The youngest member of a law firm must take his chances, evidently."

"Very lucky to have business, I suppose," suggested Sheldon, with inexcusable optimism. "He ought to inveigle his seniors down here for a night or two. They would probably transfer the office bodily to one of the booths on the beach. The attraction has worked wonderfully in my case, though I was n't clever enough to foresee it, and did none of the luring myself. I wonder now," turning with a sudden idea toward Katherine, "if the Wise Woman builded better than she knew, or whether she had designs."

"A varied experience convinces me that she usually has designs," replied the girl.

Mrs. Ormond looked displeased. "I 'm sure I wish Gilbert had some friend at court."

"Is that a play upon words?" asked Madeline. "I believe the courts are closed." She disapproved her mother's manner. Of course she did not think of Fritz seriously, but he possessed piquant interest for her, and she knew that "vinegar does not attract flies." She did not wish him to dread this piazza.

The long white beach at Pokonet was a daily rendezvous for the boarders in that and the adja-

cent villages. Wagonloads of bathers were driven over from the inland portions of the pretty town, but the fortunate inmates of the Hodgson house strayed through flowery fields to the sea at their own sweet will, unless an overweening spirit of luxurious laziness suggested that they allow Mose, the faithful family steed, to draw them thither.

When the white flag flung abroad its announcement of Neptune's good nature, vehicles of all sizes and sorts, from the smart private equipage to the well-filled hay wagon, began to appear along the country road, headed for the sand dunes, behind whose friendly protection many an old horse dozed away the morning hours while waiting for the pleasure seekers whose gay shrieks, as they gamboled in the waves, came faintly to his ears.

Katherine and Madeline were experienced bathers, and sometimes Mrs. Ormond and Miss McKnight also went into the surf; but more often they rested, either on the seats under the evergreen boughs which roofed their own particular booth, or sat on the beach and leaned against the wooden backs which they planted in the white sand.

Miss McKnight was finding, as people who expect to discover it do find, that Fate had arranged for her better than she would have done for herself. She had been denied a life under the same roof with the Ormonds. She realized now that the abiding-place Mrs. Hodgson had found for her with a neighbor gave her greater independence and quiet; there was room there

also for her brother, and it looked now as if her summer would give her all she had hoped from it.

The hours that she and Mrs. Ormond spent upon the beach, their bodies side by side and their minds widely sundered, were not fatiguing to her. For one thing, she could gently loosen the association when she liked; for another, it was often scarcely necessary to say a word. Mrs. Ormond enjoyed talking, and Miss McKnight enjoyed listening — to the ocean, and watching the clouds. Different as were their standards and points of view, they had one hearty interest in common, and that was their children.

"Old maids' children are said to be perfect, you know," replied Miss McKnight one morning on the beach, when Mrs. Ormond had just indulged in a eulogium upon Jasper.

"I am very fond of him," returned Mrs. Ormond, with serious unction, ignoring her companion's laughing remark. "I love Jasper like my own son. Is n't Madeline a graceful bather?" continued the mother, her eyes fixed on two heads enveloped in red silk handkerchiefs, whose owners rose lightly on a strong billow, while it overturned a timid, shrieking woman who never ventured away from the rope.

"Both the girls bathe well. I enjoy watching them. I expected my brother and Fritz to be here by this time. I left them buried deep in papers."

"Mr. Sheldon used to be bathing-master here," said Mrs. Ormond.

"Indeed? Then I 'm sure it will be a treat to see him go into the water."

"When do you suppose we shall have our poor boys?" exclaimed Mrs. Ormond rather dolorously.

"I should n't be surprised to see Jasper any time. I hope he and Gilbert can come together."

As it happened, at the very time these remarks were being made, Jasper McKnight was on his way to Pokonet. He was not a smoker, and as he boarded the Long Island train in the city, his chief aim was, if possible, to get a seat on its shady side.

Moving through one car after another with this object in view, his eyes brightened as they discovered Marguerite Laird. She had evidently just ensconced herself, with her satchel beside her, and was trying to improve the arrangement of the window blind as he approached.

"Let me wrestle with that, Miss Laird," he said, lifting his hat. "I have had a longer experience than you with the intricacies of these particular windows."

"Oh, are you going down to-day, Dr. McKnight?" She turned in surprise.

"Yes. I have shaken the dust of Montaigne from my feet at last, and what a lot of it there has been lately. If you will allow me to hold your satchel, my vacation can begin at once. I ave been wishing for a month to make a call

upon you, and was never able to find the time." Marguerite signified that he might sit down. "It seems odd, when I am across the hall from you an hour each day, that I can never see you. Mental telegraphy has not arrived at the point where it can be called a fully satisfactory means of communication, and formal calling has been an almost impossible indulgence for me lately."

"You have to make the whist club serve you for purposes of sociability," remarked Marguerite.

"Yes, when I am fortunate enough not to have to send a substitute; and if you can suggest any form of sociability more meagre than a game of whist, I shall be obliged to you."

"One is rather hampered in the line of conversation," answered Marguerite, as the train started. "I have heard that whist is the only game which four people of different nationalities, ignorant of one another's language, can play understandingly. Fancy to what a height of the science those four strangers must have attained!"

"Yes, they would be too wise for our whist club. I know, Miss Laird, I have been talking as if I were immensely important to the welfare of Montaigne's sick and suffering; but I have been busy. It is n't any sinecure to be hands and feet to Dr. Granbury's head, after the old gentleman begins to trust you."

Marguerite smiled at the rather anxious tone. "I know you have been busy. You are n't troubling yourself to apologize to me, are you?"

"No, I am explaining; for I have wanted to see you."

Dr. McKnight was in a different way as susceptible as Katherine Ormond to the indefinable piquant charm of Marguerite's presence; the delicate repellence, the fine aloofness of her sphere was a fact he remembered well from time to time. Her dainty, dark, cool garb now pleased his taste. She did not look heated on this quiveringly hot day. "I have a right to be discontented to be near and yet far from you," he added, "for am I not one of your oldest friends? You admitted as much at the club ball."

"You can be as social as you like for a few days now," returned Marguerite, scarcely knowing what she said, as her thoughts flew back to the scene he had recalled, and the pangs with which she had been ushered into a new life.

"I suppose you like surf-bathing," said her companion."

"I went into the surf twice last summer, but I was very stupid. I don't see how any one learns to jump the waves at the right moment."

"You will learn this season. The Ormonds are amphibious. Gilbert expects to get off soon."

"I am glad. The only drawback to going out of the oven into the oxygen is that everybody else can't go too. I feel so happy about Fritz. I begin to think he was born with the silver spoon, after all."

Jasper met her glance, so suddenly rich with

feeling as she spoke of her brother that he wondered what other man would evoke the transfiguration.

"It must be a mixed pleasure to your relatives," he said, "that this season has created such a boom for Pokonet."

"Aunt Althea is an excellent manager. She has good help, and I have no doubt she and uncle Silas are enjoying themselves. You know they are devoted to Katherine Ormond."

"To the whole family, I suppose. I believe they had a large share in bringing them up, and my experience is that the more of a torment children are to those who train them, the more they are doted upon."

Marguerite looked out the window. "Then Katherine must have made the most trouble," she answered. "I am venturing to surprise my aunt," she added.

"And I, mine, although the nervous shock in aunt Edna's case will be slight, since she has expected me by every train for days."

Nevertheless, the arrival of this couple at the old farm made a certain sensation. Miss McKnight was at the Hodgsons' that afternoon, sitting with her neighbors on the large, roofed piazza which had become their living-room, and when Marguerite and Dr. McKnight made their appearance, there was for a few seconds a confusion of tongues and as great a variety of facial expression.

Fritz smiled broadly as he met his happy sister.

"Weren't you thoughtful, to save me the trouble of coming to the station!" he remarked feelingly.

"Isn't a brother's gallantry lovely, Miss McKnight?" laughed the girl, as she passed from him to the Wise Woman.

The visible cloud upon Mrs. Ormond's face reminded Madeline that she must not show a similar one, so she threw off the resentment which the sight of the new-comers as traveling companions had aroused in her, and received Jasper's greeting as smilingly as Katherine.

"Aren't you feeling well, Mrs. Ormond?" he asked.

"It makes me a little sad to think of Gilbert. Just think, if he were here, your family and ours would be complete!"

"It won't be long, I fancy," said McKnight, turning to look after Marguerite, as she and Katherine moved toward the house. "Don't forget your promise, Miss Laird. You said you would try to recall me to the recollection of your aunt and uncle."

"When did you ever see them?" asked Madeline in surprise.

Jasper regarded her reproachfully. "You are as uncomplimentary as I expect they will be. You have forgotten my one visit to Pokonet which, as you could scarcely have been more than seven years old at the time, I suppose I shall have to forgive you."

"I will try to make it up to you on this your second visit," returned Madeline graciously.

Mr. Hodgson drew his niece aside an hour later, when the McKnights had gone home.

"Say, Rita, is that your feller, — that man you come down with?" he asked in husky, confidential tones.

"No, indeed," she answered, casting a quick glance about for possible auditors.

"Ye 're as red 's a piny. Bet he is," returned the old man triumphantly.

"Hush, Uncle Silas. It would be very mortifying if anybody should hear you, for Dr. McKnight is attentive to one of the Ormond girls."

"What 'd he fetch you down for, then?" pursued the old man obstinately.

"He did n't. We happened to meet on the train."

"I 've heerd o' such happenin's!"

"You are entirely mistaken, and I hope you won't try to tease me about this. You will spoil all my pleasure."

"Jingo! Ye 're in earnest, girl, ain't ye? All right. Mum 's the word. Ye did n't tell me which Ormond, though."

"You will find that out for yourself." Marguerite gave a faint smile.

"My eyes ain't what they was," grumbled the old man.

"They 're good enough for that, Uncle Silas."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MATERNAL ANXIETIES.

"I will thy name repeat,
Marguerite!"

sang Gilbert Ormond at the foot of the Hodgsons' short, winding staircase, "at least I shall repeat it till you come," he continued.

"All right; go on," answered Miss Laird from some mysterious point above. "It is an innocent amusement."

The low ceilings of the old house brought its two stories into such neighborliness that communication by speech between the two was easy.

"When are you coming?" inquired Gilbert a little later.

"Just as soon as I get ready," responded Marguerite sweetly.

"Girls are always late," grumbled the lower voice.

"That is not original. I am almost certain that I've heard it before," was returned from upstairs.

At this moment Fritz put an inquiring face in at the screen door, near which Gilbert was standing.

"What is the matter with Marguerite? She is never late."

"Aha! Do you hear that, Mr. Ormond?" came triumphantly from above.

"I don't know," replied Gilbert, answering Sheldon. "I have interceded, implored, besought, all in vain. I don't wonder she wants to remember everything before coming down those stairs, though," he added in a different tone. "Did you ever see anything so ingeniously uncomfortable as their build? Mother threatens she 'll never come down here again without her alpenstock to help her climb them. Oh, you don't say you 're coming?" for here Marguerite appeared, and began to descend. Gilbert smiled up at her.

"Was the little boy in an awful hurry to go to ride?" responded Miss Laird soothingly. "Well, he should; so there, there!"

Mrs. Ormond's ostensible reason for discontent had been removed a couple of days before by her son's arrival. She came from the sitting-room into the little hall now.

"You are really going on that drive, are you?" she said. "Sha'n't you find it very dusty?"

"You must have forgotten last night's showers," returned Fritz good-humoredly. "Where are your apologies, Marguerite?"

"I found something important to do at the last minute, so please excuse me; but I think you are all very ungrateful to complain of sitting still a few minutes this beautiful morning. I don't

believe Katherine has fumed, have you, Katherine?"

The latter looked from her seat in the carriage, as her friends came out on the steps.

"I defy anybody to disturb me," she replied. "I did think, a minute ago, the horses would n't wait any longer, though. Good-by, mother. Are n't you going to the beach?"

"Yes. Jasper and Madeline have gone on. I promised to follow; but I wanted to see you started first."

The speaker's anxieties did not go with that couple who had departed across the field followed by her unspoken benediction. It was right here that the watchfulness of her maternal eye was required.

"Are you going to sit there, Miss Katherine?" asked Fritz, regarding the girl, who was seated in the back of the carriage. "I am going to drive, and I hoped you were going to talk to me."

"Yes," said Gilbert. "Get out, please, Katherine, and let Miss Marguerite take your place."

"Surely not, Gilbert," said Mrs. Ormond, quickly. "It is n't worth while to make any trouble."

"Say, mother," her son turned upon her, "who 's taking this drive?"

"Sensible people, I hope," she answered. "There is nothing that looks so countrified as girls and men driving in pairs in a double carriage."

"Well, where are we?" demanded Gilbert. "We want to look countrified. There is nothing stiff and unadaptable about us, I hope."

Katherine had started to obey her brother, but her mother's words and look made her hesitate.

"It is certainly not very important," said Marguerite carelessly, and she ended the discussion by stepping into the vacant place beside Katherine.

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Gilbert. "Mother, why did n't you remember a little earlier in the day how healthful sea bathing is?" He and Fritz took their places, and the livery boy who had brought the horses moved off, chuckling.

Mrs. Ormond smiled. "Saucy child! Well, good-by, young people," she added, as the carriage started. "Have a good time."

"Since you can't hinder us, we will," was Marguerite's reply; but it was a mental one, and she smiled encouragingly into Katherine's sober face, which seemed to kindle from her friend's look, and take on its usual bright aspect.

Sheldon turned his horses' heads inland, and drove through the outskirts of the pretty village among farmhouses covered to the ridgepole with clambering vines. Families of pink, infantile pigs gamboled in the grass, geese and ducks made the air occasionally vocal, and the sight and sound of nobler birds enlivened their way through strips of green meadow, and oak forests full of sweet fern and pierced by sunshine.

The wood road wound and ascended insensibly, the horses pulling slowly through the sand, until, arriving at an opening, Fritz made them halt. Across undulating fields lay Pokonet, nestling among its trees, and beyond, between the billowy dunes, there showed painted ships upon a painted ocean.

It was a winsome picture. "Now, Mr. Sheldon," said Katherine, as they all looked upon it, "at last I defy you to think of steam!"

"No," answered Fritz pensively, "I was thinking of sails. I was wondering if the accepted shape of sails is really the best that can be."

The girls laughed. "I give you up," said Katherine, and her tone made Sheldon look around at her.

"Oh, don't give me up, Miss Katherine."

"You are so hopelessly utilitarian."

"But you are n't."

"I should hope not."

"Then that is the reason you ought to keep me with you, not give me up."

"If there were any hope of reforming you now," said Katherine, "but of course I could n't succeed where Marguerite has failed."

"In my bright lexicon there is no such word as fail," remarked Miss Laird airily. "I have n't tried to reform him. In fact, I 'm another."

"Another what? Utilitarian?" asked Gilbert. "You want me to contradict you, and, with my usual sweet compliance, I will."

"You need n't contradict me. I 'll prove my position," returned Marguerite. "Fritz, if you don't start those horses, we shall be late to dinner. We promised to stop in the village to get the mail. There, behold my common sense!"

"Oh, who wants the mail?" ejaculated Gilbert. "I have come to Pokonet, the world forgetting, and oh, how I hope, by the world forgot."

"That 's it!" returned Marguerite triumphantly. "Fritz is quite right. It is a good thing that there is a utilitarian on each seat of this carriage."

"I can think of useful and necessary things too when I want to," said Katherine with dignity. "When we are as near as the post-office, it will kill two birds with one stone if we stop at Bennett's and get soda."

"Katherine!" exclaimed her brother reproachfully. "Do you think that is kind? Bennett is n't quite Huyler, of course; but I think you slander his soda."

The drive was a long one, and the party were a trifle late to dinner. Gilbert did not fail to ascribe the circumstance to Marguerite's tardiness at the start.

"I sh'd think, Gilly," said Mr. Hodgson, slowly looking up from his carver's place at the table, "that Adam's excuse would be jest a trifle too old-fashioned for you;" and Gilbert joined in the laugh at his own expense.

"Mr. Ormond is such a conventional young man, uncle Silas," explained Marguerite. "He

must have a most respectable precedent for everything he does."

The girl, as she spoke, seated herself at her aunt's right hand, a place she had gayly quarreled for with Katherine, claiming it as her right to relieve Mrs. Hodgson of all possible labor in serving.

"How was the bathing, Madeline?" asked Katherine. "Did you miss me?"

"No, it was a little rough, and I must say I preferred Jasper as a companion, to you."

Fritz met the speaker's eyes with his good-humored gaze.

"With your predilection for taking risks, Miss Madeline, I think, myself, Dr. McKnight is an excellent companion for you. He could rescue and resuscitate you in great shape."

"He can't swim like Mr. Sheldon, though," responded Madeline archly.

"Jasper does n't pretend to be a professional swimmer," remarked Mrs. Ormond. "How is it that I have n't seen you in the water since you came, Mr. Sheldon? Is it too much like shop?"

Katherine darted a swift glance at her mother, and then caught the little smile which curved Marguerite's lips.

"Well, I guess it is n't," put in Mrs. Hodgson. "It 's just about as much of a treat for Fritz to go swimmin' as it is for anybody."

"The real truth is, though," added Katherine, "that he loves shop not wisely, but too well. He

won't play truant as he ought to, but likes best of all to browse about among those mysterious papers with Mr. McKnight."

Fritz looked at her with smiling eyes, stopping so long with some peas poised on his fork that the girl began to feel embarrassed.

"The Wise Woman says," she continued, in order to fill up the pause, "that you are one of the fortunate people of the world, because you love your work."

"But you must n't love it better than play, or we shall expect you to become translated, one of these beautiful summer days," remarked Madeline.

The peas found their destination as Sheldon glanced at the last speaker, and thereafter, all through the remainder of the dinner hour, he continued to look at Madeline from time to time so fixedly that his sister noticed it with some uneasiness. Madeline was conscious also of this observation, and decided that the negligée twist which her sunny hair had received after coming out of the water must be particularly becoming. She resolved to look in the glass when the meal was over, and get hints for the future.

"I think four of you going to drive together was very exclusive," she declared. "It should be the rule here that no one may do anything in which the whole party cannot join."

"A straw ride would suit you, perhaps," suggested Gilbert.

"Oh, yes, a straw ride!" exclaimed Madeline, delightedly. "Let us have one the very first moonlight night. Now," turning to Fritz, "see that you do not rush off to Newark just at the wrong moment."

"That depends on Mr. McKnight. If he pulls the string — why, up I go."

"Before I would be a puppet!" exclaimed Madeline saucily.

"It won't excite our compassion at all, if you are whisked away," remarked Katherine. "You know you would rather 'see wheels go 'round' at the Works than over the side of a hay wagon."

"Look here, I object to having Sheldon made out such a monstrosity," said Gilbert. "I don't see how he has managed to get up such a reputation as a slave to duty. No one seems troubled by my yearning to be immersed in legal questions rather than in salt water."

"There you are!" laughed Katherine. "You see you don't belong in the Wise Woman's most fortunate class."

"Go 'way. The person who wants to work instead of play in summer time is diseased. He ought to go to a hospital for nervous disorders."

Marguerite glanced across at her robust brother. "Fritz looks ready for that, does n't he?" she said.

"I 'm not very well, uncle Silas," declared Sheldon. "How does the bluefish hold out? You might give me a fraction of a pound more, any

fraction you like, and see what it will do for my nervous system."

"You all spoil him," said Mrs. Ormond vexedly to Madeline after dinner. "You pay that young man altogether too much attention."

"That was a mean thing you said to him, mother," returned the girl, with warmth.

"What, pray?"

"About swimming being shop. Gilbert just glared at you."

"Well, upon my word! It is a pity your Mr. Sheldon can't be kept in cotton wool."

"He is n't my Mr. Sheldon." Madeline tossed her head. "He might have been, if I had wanted him, but I did n't."

The milliner's brother commanded her admiration to such an extent that she liked to return repeatedly to this memory. It was a pleasure to voice it.

Her mother regarded her in genuine amazement. "Will you explain yourself?" she said, in a portentous tone.

Madeline shrugged her shoulder. "You need n't look tragic. It is an old story. It happened at the period you twitted him with, — when he was bathing-master."

Mrs. Ormond caught the girl's hand. "My pretty child! What an escape!" she said solemnly. "You were so young, you might easily have been foolish." The speaker looked carefully about to make sure they were alone. "He is

really very good-looking, with that attractive strength and genial manner which might have entrapped so young a girl. Don't talk with him or be with him any more than you can help," she continued emphatically. "There is a charm to a girl about any man who she knows loves her, and even with that presumptuous fellow it might be dangerous. Pray, what right has he to be sensitive about any calling he may have followed? He is only a sort of superior mechanic, a workman, a laborer. Oh, my good child, you have been so sensible. Now don't play with fire!"

Madeline listened to this speech with mixed sensations. It flattered her in one way, but she did not enjoy hearing Fritz belittled. Sheldon she realized had not apparently disturbed himself about her the past winter. It was only in her most complacent moments that she could fancy that he concealed deeper feeling than he showed. It was this fact which made her turn from her mother now with some impatience.

"Oh, I am not a child," she answered.

"He stared at you so at dinner time," said Mrs. Ormond uneasily.

"Yes, but I can't help that," was the reply.

"Of course we feel very sorry for him," went on the mother, "but I shall be consolable when Mr. McKnight takes him back to Newark. How," added Mrs. Ormond, and paused before continuing, — "how did Jasper seem this morning?"

"In his usual health, thank you," smiled Madeline.

"This, my dear," the lady spoke impressively, "is a very different matter."

"I understand your wishes," said the girl briefly.

"I hope, my child, they are not displeasing to you."

"I would n't advise you to make them too obvious," remarked Madeline dryly. "This life is full of disappointments."

Mrs. Ormond looked at her a moment in silence. "I wish you would not make me unhappy by such suggestions," she said at last. "You are a prize, Madeline, for a man who does not need to marry money, and you remember Thackeray says that any woman who has n't a positive hump may marry any man she pleases."

"Thackeray never said a more false and foolish thing. You must have seen facts contradict that declaration. I have, more than once."

"I wish I knew just how much you mean," said Mrs. Ormond, after another silent, baffled look. "Tell me one thing, Madeline. Do you know of any other girl to whom Dr. McKnight pays as much attention as he does to you?"

"Of course not," was the prompt reply, given with an indignant air which restored the mother's smiling confidence.

Mrs. Ormond strolled over to see the Wise Woman that afternoon. Surely, the latter was undeserving of the appellation if she could not see that two young persons who were created for each

other should be helped on toward their mutual happiness by those who loved them best.

She found Miss McKnight sitting out-of-doors and reading a book, which was closed with courteous alacrity as the latter rose to greet her guest.

"You really ought not to settle down here, my dear, when our house is close by," said Mrs. Ormond. "The cozy corners at the Hodgsons' are more numerous and attractive than here at the Berrys'."

"I suppose there is a certain charm about one's own domicile, and I have adopted this. Sit down in this corner. You will find the few intrusive sunbeams rather agreeable. What is going on to-day?"

"Oh, the usual things. You didn't get down to the beach this morning. Madeline and Jasper had a fine time. The rollers were large, and if it had been anybody but Jasper with my baby, I should have been frightened sometimes; but they enjoyed it." Mrs. Ormond sighed. "I am so glad for every happy, care-free time my child has."

"Dear me. I fancied Madeline's were numerous."

Mrs. Ormond shook her head. "Indeed, I assure you the path of an attractive girl isn't all roses; that is, provided the girl has a heart, and Madeline is all heart, poor little one."

Mrs. Ormond paused, but Miss McKnight, beyond looking courteously attentive and potentially sympathetic, did not give her a cue.

"To tell you the truth, Edna, — and oh, what a comfort it is that I can talk to you as to an own sister, — I shall be glad, unselfish as it sounds, glad to see Madeline married. Of course, no girl with sensibilities talks about those things, but it is a trying thing to have to refuse men."

Miss McKnight bowed gravely.

"And when a girl is unavoidably thrown with a rejected suitor, it is painful, — one of the things that really wears upon her, you know."

"I can easily imagine that."

"Now there is that Sheldon" —

"What?" Miss McKnight started, as the involuntary exclamation broke from her.

"Aha!" thought Mrs. Ormond triumphantly. "You are very philanthropic and democratic in theory, but this begins to come home to you, does it?" Her face expressed nothing of her mental triumph, and she nodded. "Yes, indeed. You can imagine how it startled me to learn of it."

"I am so sorry to hear this," said Miss McKnight fervently.

"Oh, there are no heights, apparently, to which that brother and sister are not willing to aspire," returned Mrs. Ormond, allowing her chronic resentment to be manifest for the moment. "I am sure you should be the last one to blame Madeline for this occurrence. I don't want to say anything disagreeable, Edna, nor to meddle in your business. You have a right to encourage and receive any one you see fit; but certainly you made it

very hard for the girls not to welcome those young persons as social equals."

Mrs. Ormond was vaguely conscious of her own obliquity in laying upon her friend the responsibility of an occurrence which took place years before Miss McKnight knew the culprit; but in her own opinion she had such just cause for complaint, she could not bring herself to weaken her cause by a slavish adherence to facts.

Perhaps, owing to the Wise Woman's habit of inattention to her friend's monologues, she did not now clearly grasp the mother's reproaches. She merely regarded her abstractedly, and repeated: —

"I am so sorry! Why, I have seen nothing to make me suspect that this was coming."

Mrs. Ormond raised her eyebrows. "You should have seen him stare at Madeline all dinner time to-day. I don't see how the poor child was able to eat. Children of nature may be very interesting to some people," the speaker could not here eliminate all spite from her tone; "but for my own part, I prefer the more cultivated article. There is nothing more tiresome than transparent honesty."

Miss McKnight's far-away gaze suddenly focused itself on her friend's eyes. "Are you quite sure Madeline's answer was final?" she asked.

Mrs. Ormond, her own mind filled with the image of Jasper, thought she understood the reason for the anxiety in this question.

"Edna McKnight!" she ejaculated. "I am almost indignant with you for asking such a thing."

"Oh, I didn't mean to criticise the child. I was n't suspecting her of coquetry, but a girl does n't always know her own mind at first. Fritz may have surprised her nearly as much as he has me. I thought I knew him so well, and I never suspected this. The love of such a nobleman is a great and precious treasure, a greater thing, perhaps, than a light-hearted, popular girl like Madeline can immediately appreciate."

Mrs. Ormond reddened in her surprise, and tittered half hysterically. "Are you thinking of Sir Thomas Hodgson when you use such flattering terms?"

"Indeed, I was never more earnest. Fritz Sheldon is one of nature's noblemen, such as you meet once or twice in a lifetime. Madeline, in my opinion, has received a great honor."

"Indeed?" returned Mrs. Ormond, breathing fast with anger, but controlling herself by an effort. "Take it home closer still. How would you like to see Jasper marry a girl inferior to him in station and advantages?"

A slight smile softened the Wise Woman's lips, as she slowly shook her head. "My likes would not figure. It is taking a grave responsibility to meddle in such matters."

"You would quietly let such a thing go on, supposing it were possible?"

Miss McKnight bowed. "A mother should bring her children up to respect the highest standard she can set before them. That is all she can do."

"Do you mean that you would not use all your influence with Jasper for or against desirable and undesirable girls of his acquaintance?"

"I certainly should not." The decided reply sent Mrs. Ormond's regard for her dear friend down to zero. "In my code, it would not only be unwise, in the case of a man like Jasper, it would be a — a vulgarity."

"Theories are easy to build and to declare," said Mrs. Ormond, scarcely conscious that she rose as she spoke. "I should have to remind you of this talk, I think, if actual occurrences brought the case home to you. You are willing enough to give my child away to your *protégé*, but how should you like Jasper to marry Miss Laird, and call Silas Hodgson 'uncle'?"

The Wise Woman had risen when her guest did, and now she met this excited challenge with a smile. "All good girls are princesses," she said calmly, regarding the other's defiant countenance, "but Marguerite Laird" — she spoke the name with affectionate admiration and paused, then added impressively — "is a crown princess!"

Mrs. Ormond remained dumb for a moment, and in that moment Jasper McKnight came hurriedly around the corner of the piazza where they sat.

The guest regarded him, startled, and wondered in that instant whether the flush on his dark bright face was from heat. She uttered a rather mirthless laugh.

"You came just in time, Jasper. Your aunt and I had forgotten that summer is no time for argument, and were hard at it. Let us see. Do combatants shake hands after coming out of the ring as well as just before going into it? We will, at any rate. I really must be going, so good-by, Edna," and Mrs. Ormond retreated in good order without, sore within, and repeatedly asking the same question of her own fast-beating heart, — "Did Jasper hear?"

The young physician took the seat she had vacated, and began to whistle under his breath, meanwhile fanning himself with his hat, and meeting his aunt's silent regard. She, too, was asking herself how much he had heard.

"Aren't you going to sit down?" he asked at last.

"I was just wondering whether I would."

Miss McKnight spoke gravely. The thought of Fritz's trouble had returned to weigh heavily on her heart.

"Better sit down," said Jasper. "I will read you something out of that magazine;" and she complied mechanically.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BUOYS.

MRS. ORMOND kept the scene recorded in the last chapter locked in her own breast. She went to her room with the headache as soon as she reached home, but the next morning found her refreshed, and ready to be at her usual post on the beach.

All three girls walked down with her through the field to the sea.

"Your daughters have excited my ambition so, Mrs. Ormond. "No matter how many duckings I get, I am determined some time to swim as they do," said Marguerite.

"Yes? I don't know that you ever can, though. There is something in beginning when one is very young."

"I think you must have thrown me in *à la* savage when I was a baby, mother," remarked Madeline. "It seems to me I wa' .ays at home in the water."

Mrs. Ormond looked over her shoulder across the fields.

"Are n't we to have any of our young men this morning?" she asked.

"Gilbert drove to the village to do an errand for Mrs. Hodgson," said Katherine.

"It was so kind of him," put in Marguerite.

"I should think so," remarked Mrs. Ormond. "Gilbert always was too good-natured. He lets himself be im — "

"Do see that crow, mother!" interrupted Katherine. "No, it is n't a crow, either. I believe it is a gull. It 's hard to be sure of anything, this dazzling morning, except that everything is radiant."

The three girls were so, at all events. Mrs. Ormond regarded her daughters with satisfaction. As soon as Jasper had performed the one thing required of him, she felt that her cup of content would be full. She never gave more than a passing thought to Katherine's future. Katherine was one of the little-noticed requisites to daily comfort, not beautiful or brilliant, only necessary. She never considered what it would be to get along without Katherine.

Midway of the field they met Fritz Sheldon. "You are going the wrong way," cried Madeline gayly.

"I had to take my plunge early," he said, looking at Katherine, as they paused. "Mr. McKnight wants me this morning."

"How tiresome! He always wants you," returned Madeline. Her mother seized her arm and gently urged her along.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" asked Fritz, addressing Katherine.

"Anything that comes up," she answered.

"Want to go crabbing?"

"Yes, indeed. It is chronic with me to want to go crabbing." Fritz was lifting his hat to move on. "One condition, though," she added, her eyes twinkling as she stretched forth a warning hand. "You must promise not to try to invent some way to make crabs walk forward. I am opposed to vivisection. No taking off their legs and putting them on hind side before, or anything of that kind!"

Sheldon's rare laugh sounded heartily across the field, and made Mrs. Ormond turn back uneasily; but Katherine was following sedately with Marguerite, and the objectionable mechanic was departing with satisfactory haste.

His was a singularly heart-whole laugh, Mrs. Ormond could not help considering; but one should not look for deep feeling from that species, she decided.

"Where is Jasper?" she inquired, rather crossly.

"I haven't him about me," was her daughter's retort.

The girls were in the water before Dr. McKnight appeared. Mrs. Ormond was sitting in the sand trying to arrange her board support to suit her, when she heard his voice.

"Let me do that."

"Oh, thank you, Jasper. Katherine didn't sink it deep enough, and it has been slipping, slipping, ever since."

The doctor fixed the board firmly in place, then stood up and waved his hat to the mermaids sporting in the waves.

Mrs. Ormond followed his gaze complacently. Her girls were encouraging and helping Marguerite, who pluckily submitted to many a choking tumble in her efforts to emulate their skill.

"Poor Miss Laird!" said Jasper, laughing aloud in sympathy with the merriment in the water.

"Yes," remarked Mrs. Ormond. "I think she would better hold by the rope, and go in but very little way. She is too ambitious. She should be satisfied with small things."

"I think I will join them, Mrs. Ormond. *Au revoir*," and the doctor hurried away toward the bath-house.

Now things were going as they should. Mrs. Ormond smiled unconsciously as she watched the shifting, dizzying play of water piling up and falling away from the shore.

In a few minutes Dr. McKnight ran past her, jumping into the brine and bobbing up and down until his crisp, dark hair was flattened to his head. She watched with benevolent interest as laughing greetings were interchanged, then saw Madeline push out a little way, rise upon a big wave, then swim off a few strokes.

"Why doesn't Jasper stop talking to those girls, and go with Madeline?" she thought, not uneasily; she knew her child was at home, and

the bathing-master was on the watch, but it chafed her always to see the young physician speak to Marguerite Laird.

This feeling had been painfully increased by yesterday's talk with his aunt. Mrs. Ormond had reckoned on her as an ally. Now she felt, and with some mortification as well as resentment, that she stood alone.

Jasper continued to keep his back turned to Madeline.

"You are doing finely, Miss Laird," he said encouragingly.

"Oh, I don't think so," she returned breathlessly. "It is a knack, and I 'm afraid I 'll never get it. The undertow is like a giant hand that drags at my feet and frightens me in spite of myself."

"Come, let me help you." Jasper took the hands which in the bewilderment of the seething water she willingly yielded, and drew her a little farther out.

The tide was rising, and the billows increasing.

"I want to be a cork like Katherine," she gasped, as a wave struck her, and she clung more tightly to the supporting hands.

"You are not frightened, are you?"

"A little."

"Trust me, and you shall be a cork."

A step further out, and a roller went completely over Jasper's head, while Marguerite found herself gently lifted above it.

"It is glorious! you will be drowned!" she ejaculated, as the smile gleamed above her in his olive-skinned face, and he let her sink down between two waves.

"I take lots of drowning," he answered, and up she went again, while the tide went roaring over his head.

Mrs. Ormond from her sandy throne looked on. "Oh, it is convenient to be a novice, very convenient," she soliloquized wrathfully. "It is very nice to monopolize the attention of the only man in the party. Who is that with Madeline? Oh, it is one of those Deweys. Why, Edna, is that you?" she added aloud with a start, for she had been so absorbed that she did not notice the approach of her friend.

Miss McKnight seated herself beside her. "Yes, I came down with Fritz."

"I thought he said Mr. McKnight needed him."

"Yes; but Robert decided after all to drive about a little this morning with Mr. Hodgson, so Fritz thought he could catch the bathers, and we hurried down. He is in the bath-house."

In a few minutes Sheldon approached in his bathing-suit.

"It is a good thing you have come to help your sister," said Mrs. Ormond.

Fritz looked toward the splashing, laughing couple, who had now come into shallower water.

"Rita seems to be doing very well," he replied,

with an equanimity for which Mrs. Ormond could willingly have stabbed him with her bonnet pin.

"Hurry up!" said Miss McKnight. "The girls will be getting tired. I want to see you swim."

He obediently ran down the slope into the water, and took a header through a great green roller which sent its foam in irregular lacework nearly to the watchers' feet.

Miss McKnight looked on admiringly, Mrs. Ormond eagerly. Would he come back to Marguerite? His were the legitimate arms to support her as she "bobbed up serenely" on the "emerald hills." He returned, shaking the water from his eyes, but it was Katherine he approached.

"You repented," she said.

"Mr. McKnight did, and I hurried back. Fate seemed determined not to allow you and me to have a social swim, but she has relented."

"I have been wanting to go out to the buoys," said Katherine, "but I did n't quite like to, alone."

"Better take that some time when you are fresh," suggested Sheldon.

"Do you call that far?"

"Yes, for you."

"That shows how little you appreciate my powers," said the girl gayly. "I must go now any way, to show off."

"I would n't. You must have been in the water fifteen minutes already."

"But I have n't been doing anything except float about and help Marguerite shriek."

"That takes breath, though. Remember I 'm an old salt. I 've been bathing-master."

"And you seem to fancy yourself so still," returned the girl, with a saucy smile. "Good-by, Mr. Sheldon, it may be for years, and it may be forever; but I prophesy it is for about twenty minutes."

She struck out toward the barrels bobbing in the distance.

In an instant Fritz was swimming beside her. "You did n't suppose I would let you go alone?"

"No, perhaps I did n't," she answered, her eyes twinkling at him as she laid her head to one side and cut through the water.

"Don't talk any more," he said, "and swim quietly."

"Do see Katherine and Fritz," said Marguerite to Dr. McKnight. "Where can they be going?"

"I hope not far in that direction," returned Jasper. "I think it is risky for a girl to get far from shore. There is always the possibility of cramp for anybody."

"Fritz would n't ask her to do anything risky," said Marguerite, "and how beautifully they go; but how do they dare? Just think! Nothing beneath them but water and — and sharks!"

Jasper smiled. "Are you going in, Miss Laird?"

"Yes." She smiled back at him. "I am ever so much obliged to you, but I think I 've had enough."

"I think so, too. Your teeth are beginning to chatter suspiciously."

Miss McKnight beckoned as they sought dry land, and they approached, and sat down in the sunshine near the two friends.

"Bravo, Marguerite," said the Wise Woman, kindly. "How soon do you think you will be venturing off there like Katherine?"

"We've been watching them. Isn't she daring, Mrs. Ormond?"

"Katherine is an unusual swimmer for a girl, I'm told," was the stiff reply. Mrs. Ormond was in the worst possible humor. For the first time in her life, she was incensed with Jasper. "All the same," she added tartly, "I should suppose Mr. Sheldon would turn back by now. I should think he would remember that a girl's strength is hardly equal to his."

Marguerite flushed and bit her lip, and Dr. McKnight saw it. "I don't believe you could give Mr. Sheldon any points in that matter, Mrs. Ormond," he said quietly. "They can't turn back now. It would make too long a stretch. They evidently mean to rest at the buoys."

Out amid the glass-green billows Katherine and Fritz swam on. The latter saw that his companion's breath began to come hard, and her white face looked strained. He pressed nearer to her and smiled.

"Shall we rest a minute? Lots of time," he said, reassuringly. "Put your hand on my shoulder."

She obeyed. "Those buoys — have such a funny way — of floating backward," she answered.

His eyes seemed to send courage into hers. "I know; but we are really not far from them now."

"Yes, and I am quite able to go on." She struck out again; but it was a very pale girl who finally grasped one of the buoyant casks and hung there.

"I am going to seat you on that," said Fritz.

"You can't," she replied breathlessly.

"I don't take a dare, Miss Ormond, any more than you do."

With some difficulty he dragged her heavily from the clinging water and seated her on the barrel. The sun and air felt warm and reviving to her.

"You did not dare me," she said gravely. "I was foolish to insist."

"I hope you don't feel any bad effects," he returned anxiously. He was balancing her unstable throne, and supporting himself thereby.

"It is my first long swim of the season, and I ought, as you said, to have been fresh when I started. For one moment there, it seemed to me there was nothing but water between me and China. I was panic-stricken." Her lip quivered as she tried bravely to smile.

Fritz looked at her solicitously, his heart shining in his honest eyes. "You ought to have told me. Were you too proud?"

"Perhaps, or too frightened, or something. You are awfully good not to crow over me."

Katherine looked so childlike, as she said it, with her round bare arms and her eyes wide and serious under the red silk handkerchief, that her companion smiled.

"You spoke to me just at the right moment, though," she added. "Otherwise, perhaps, I might have lost my head."

"I hoped we were better friends than that," said Fritz, his elbow leaning on the barrel, and his eyes still upon hers. "I find it makes me jealous to know that you are more reluctant to ask of me than of Gilbert. You would have told Gilbert you were frightened."

Katherine's color rose quickly. "I did n't know you were capable of such an unscientific emotion as jealousy," she said, with a gleam of mischief.

"Neither did I," answered Fritz, with prompt frankness. "Promise me you won't rouse it again."

"You want me to make you just as much trouble as I do Gilbert?"

"Exactly."

"Well, that is the way our acquaintance began," she said.

"Perhaps that is the reason I am impatient of any retrogression," he answered.

Neither spoke for a moment, and Katherine's color faded.

"Do you dread the return trip?" asked Sheldon at last.

She gave a quick look down into his upturned

face. "A little," she answered. "I am disappointed not to find myself stronger. It all comes of staying away so long from Pokonet."

Her companion saw that she was really uneasy.

"You do not need to dread it," he returned, and the quiet strength which was always suggested by his tone and look and manner were never more observable than now. "Don't let this become anything less than a lark," he added lightly, with a smile. "I could swim in there with you as easily as not."

Katherine felt reassured, and laughed. "That would make my venture something very much less than a lark," she said. She pictured to herself her mother's face under the supposititious circumstances. From her uneasy perch on the shifting waves, she looked toward the figures on the beach. "There, I think I am rested now," she said at last.

"Then off we go," responded Fritz cheerily. As a matter of fact, he was more anxious than Katherine to see her on dry land once more. "One moment, though; I suppose you would like to go in with flying colors."

"There 's no mistake about that. I would like to."

"Then let me suggest that you accept my assistance the first part of the way." Sheldon wished she did not look so pale, but his tone was as cheerful as possible. "Girls are handicapped, any way, by their bathing-suits."

"Oh, it always seems so much shorter going back," replied Katherine stoutly. "Thank you, but I shall be all right. Now, then."

She slipped off the cask into the water, and struck out.

"You are a good swimmer," said Fritz heartily.

He knew the paramount importance of mental conditions in the unstable element, and the best he could do was to give her a bit of stimulating praise and keep his eye on her.

She went on bravely; but no one save herself could ever know how long those seconds seemed after the first half-dozen strokes had been taken. The sea was roughening.

"Almost there," cried Fritz gayly.

It did not look so to Katherine. The beach retreated now as the buoys had done a little while before. She could not remember to float, or tread water, or use any of the means to rest which seemed so easy and natural when shallow water and a foothold were within reach. The waves were cruelly big, and noisy, and strong. She felt feeble and tiny among them.

Sheldon's watchful eye never left her face. At last she gave an involuntary exclamation, and almost instantly she felt the firm support of his arm.

She would not give up, though her breath was growing unmanageable. She would help him. She would *not* become a dead weight.

The interested group on the shore were watch-

ing them closely. The runaways were coming back, and Mrs. Ormond's uneasiness had vanished. "Katherine is entirely at home in the water," she said complacently. "I consider such swimming as hers a very useful accomplishment."

"Why, Fritz has gone to her. What are they doing?" asked Marguerite, gazing curiously.

Dr. McKnight's face changed, and he started to his feet, and looked toward the pair with a sharp but undecided gaze.

Their movements were suspicious, yet Katherine seemed to be swimming.

"What is it, Jasper?" asked Miss McKnight.

He sat down again. "I thought" — He hesitated, then sprang to his feet, ran down the sands, and plunged into the water.

The whole party rose; for his manner was startling.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Ormond, alarmed.

"Katherine, Katherine!" she cried, with sudden sharpness, for the pair were now near enough for her to see that Sheldon was holding his companion in one arm, and that she had ceased to make any motion.

Madeline came running from a little distance, and joined her exclamations to her mother's as Fritz, at last gaining his feet, and dripping like a young sea-god, came walking through the shallow water, carrying Katherine, limp and unconscious, in his arms. Dr. McKnight strode on beside him.

"Great heavens, is she dead?" shrieked Mrs. Ormond, wringing her hands. "What were you thinking of, Mr. Sheldon, to make her do such a thing! Oh, Katherine!"

"She has fainted," said Dr. McKnight curtly. "Stand back."

Fritz, not responding to any one, deposited his burden on the warm white sand.

"Here, doctor!" he gasped. Mrs. Ormond was still hysterically calling upon her child and reproaching Sheldon, when Fritz rose from a last glance at Katherine, brushed the mother aside, and started off running.

"Somebody else ought to go!" exclaimed Dr. McKnight, falling on his knees beside the unconscious girl and chafing her hands. "What strength that fellow has!"

"Where, where, doctor!" exclaimed Marguerite eagerly.

"To the Life Saving Station. Brandy and blankets."

The girl sped off in her short skirt, running like a deer up the sandy incline between the dunes to the station close by. She met her brother in the house.

Several of the men were there, eager to help. She insisted on sending one of them to the beach with the desired articles, and drew Fritz outdoors in the sunshine, where she made him sit down.

"I 'm all right," he declared, rather breathlessly.

"You will be in a minute," she returned, standing over him.

"She didn't swallow any water," he said, looking up after a little pause, during which his breathing made the only sound.

"That is good. Don't take any girl so far out again, will you?"

"Not if I can help it."

"Couldn't you help it this time?"

A smile flitted over Sheldon's tanned face. "I might have carried her on shore bodily in the first place, I suppose."

"Oh, that's it." Marguerite paused thoughtfully. "Katherine will be ashamed."

"I hope not."

Marguerite rested her hand on his shoulder. "Fritz, I have a new thermometer, or barometer, or something, to measure my own goodness by."

"Have you?"

"Yes. I can always gauge my spiritual state by my sentiments toward Mrs. Ormond."

"Humph!" ejaculated Fritz. "Talks through her hat a good deal, doesn't she? I've a vague idea she pitched into me when we came in just now."

"I should say she did."

"Never mind. She is Katherine's mother."

Marguerite's eyes widened a little at this unexpected argument. "And Madeline's," she suggested.

"Yes, that's more credible." Fritz lifted a

humorous glance to his sister's face, and her expression took on a shade of relief.

"It worried me yesterday, Fritz, to see the way you stared at Madeline at dinner," she said. "I was afraid the burned child might be forgetting the fire."

Sheldon shook his head. "No fire there," he returned quietly. "I guess I did stare at her. I was wondering how it could be that I ever lay awake all night to think about her. Just run out between those dunes, will you, Rita, and see what 's going on, on the beach."

Marguerite obeyed, and soon returned.

"Katherine is moving," she reported, "and Mr. Dewey is just bringing a carriage across the sand to take her home."

"I hope that exhaustion did n't go deep," said Fritz gravely. "Those were n't the pleasantest moments I ever spent before we got in to where I could get a foothold. The poor girl was n't light after she let go, and Neptune 's got an awful grip, but I did n't like to frighten you by singing out."

"Dear old Fritz!" exclaimed Marguerite impulsively. "I 'll try to forgive Katherine."

He turned slowly toward her a look which startled her and burned into her memory.

"You will have to forgive Katherine," was all he said; but his tone gave her food for reflection.

CHAPTER XX.

A REPENTANT CULPRIT.

"LET her alone, and let her sleep all she will."

Dr. McKnight said this so imperatively, upon leaving Mrs. Ormond at noon, that the next morning dawned before she and Madeline had an opportunity to ease their minds to Katherine concerning her escapade.

Mrs. Ormond came in her wrapper to her daughters' room at an early hour.

As Katherine opened her eyes to greet her, there were no signs of her adventure in her face.

"I am glad you have come, mother," said Madeline. "I haven't dared to speak to her for fear she was still sleeping."

"For once in my life, the only time, I believe, I have slept enough," remarked Katherine, returning her mother's kiss.

"How you frightened us, my dear!" was Mrs. Ormond's greeting. "Do you feel entirely natural this morning?"

"Entirely. I am very sorry, and as mortified as I can be about yesterday. I ask everybody's pardon," replied Katherine meekly.

"It is more than that boorish Sheldon has

done," said Mrs. Ormond. "He did n't come home to supper at all last night. I dare say he was ashamed to look me in the face."

"He was busy with Mr. McKnight, Marguerite told me," said Madeline.

"Oh, she condescended to say that much, did she? I never saw any one so dumb as that young woman can be when she chooses. She never opened her lips on the subject last evening. Any girl with feeling would at least have apologized for her brother if he had n't the grace to come and do it for himself. He never came once the whole afternoon to find out how you were after half drowning you!"

"Yes he did, mother," said Madeline. "He came over from the McKnights' for some of his drawing things, and he asked if Katherine was getting on all right."

"Very kind of him, I 'm sure," returned Mrs. Ormond, with a curling lip.

Katherine looked from one to the other with large, bewildered eyes. "Did n't Mr. Sheldon tell you? But of course he did n't. The idea of his apologizing to us! Why, mother, he said all he could to keep me from going out to those buoys. He knew I was n't in condition for it. I insisted, and went in spite of him. It was just one of those silly things I have always despised when other girls did them. I suppose he believes that I think it was fascinating of me to faint and make him no end of bother. Oh, the more I think

of it, the more idiotic it grows!" Katherine's eyes became suffused. The others stared at her blankly.

Madeline was the first to break the silence. "Well, mother, that leaves you in a pretty position," she said. "I imagine you wish now you had n't been quite so vigorous in your denunciations of Fritz."

"Don't tell me you blamed him?" exclaimed Katherine beseechingly. "Not to his face!"

"Don't ask me what I said," returned Mrs. Ormond shortly. "I was nearly beside myself."

"Oh, that does put the crowning touch to the whole performance!" groaned poor Katherine, turning her head away in despair.

It was such a novel mood for her that her mother hastened to speak: —

"Of course, any one with Mr. Sheldon's sense would make allowances for my excitement. Don't mind that."

"I suppose a crowd gathered instantly and heard you," mourned Katherine.

"Fritz did n't remain to receive all mother's flattery," said Madeline, with malicious humor. "He brushed her aside as if she were a gadfly, and lit out for the brandy and things."

"He was n't there when I waked up," said Katherine, giving expression to a thought which had risen in her mind during each wakeful interval since yesterday noon.

"Are you surprised at that?" smiled Madeline.

"I 'm sure he had been led to suspect that his place was not in the very heart of our family circle."

Katherine kept her head turned away, and gave an inarticulate murmur.

Mrs. Ormond felt uneasy. Madeline's little pouts and vexations were frequent; but to see Katherine in the dumps was wholly novel, and to know herself the chief cause of offense was irritating.

"Now look here, child," she said, patting the girl coaxingly. "Don't you take that to heart at all. I 'll turn the whole thing off in some joking way the next time I see Mr. Sheldon, and it will be all right. He is not sensitive. These thick-skinned, common people don't mind trifles."

Katherine turned over quickly on her pillow, and looked at the speaker. "Mother," she said, "if Mr. Sheldon were a common person, this world would be transformed."

Mrs. Ormond's face under this unexpected rejoinder was a study. She stood motionless, while the steady young voice went deliberately on.

"He is the kindest, best-balanced, best man I ever knew."

Madeline, who had risen, regarded the speaker curiously. "Well," said her mother, at last, "what do you expect me to do about it?"

"Oh," returned Katherine, the energy gone out of her voice, "I don't know."

"I think," remarked Madeline pertly, "that

considering he has fished so many members of your family out of the water, it would be rather graceful of you to thank him. First, it was Gilbert, I came next, and now it is Katherine. He used to rescue me on an average of once a day. I knew he liked it," here she threw a glance at Katherine, "and it did n't hurt me." Madeline had been inclined to envy her sister the sensation she made yesterday, and she might have been more disagreeable about it but for a new admirer at her shrine, a Mr. Dewey, whose incense was at present smoking high.

"If you think Mr. Sheldon's claims can be postponed until my toilet is made, I will go to my room," said Mrs. Ormond, with a mixture of scorn and dignity.

For a time after her departure, silence reigned in the room. Each sister was busy with her own thoughts. Madeline had plenty that was pleasant to think of, yet she was not so entirely self-absorbed as to be able to enjoy tasting the flattering sweets stored up in her mind while she suspected that Katherine was seriously unhappy. It was such a turning of tables for her to be obliged to adopt the rôle of comforter that she hardly knew how to begin.

"Are n't you going to get up, Katherine?" she asked, at last.

"I dread to go to the breakfast-table and meet them all," was the answer.

"You 're making a mountain out of a mole-hill,

truly you are, but if you want me to bring your breakfast up, I will."

"You are very good," returned Katherine gratefully.

As soon as Madeline had left the room, she rose and made her toilet, then sat down by an open window and looked out through the long ailanthus branches.

She had so much to think of, with such strange alternations of humiliation and pleasure, it seemed to her that her one peaceful plan of life would be to stay right here in this room alone for months, until she had lived down the one and comprehended the other.

It was a foggy morning; the sun had not yet burned the mists away. She idly watched what seemed a little snowy sail dipping rhythmically on the gray sea of the veiled field, and so real seemed the illusion, she smiled as she realized that it was the tail of a white hen out on a foraging expedition.

To be alone was the next best thing to being asleep. She wished no one, thinking especially of Marguerite, would feel obliged to come to see her.

The door of her room opened, and Miss McKnight walked in, bearing a breakfast tray.

Katherine started up in her surprise. "Dear Wise Woman! So early?"

The visitor deposited the tray on a stand, and returned the girl's affectionate greeting. After

all, the Wise Woman was the one person she wanted, and she had n't known it.

"Of course I could n't wait to see my little girl. Well, how is it?" Miss McKnight held her off and looked at her.

"I 've slept myself well, but that is all," returned Katherine, wincing under scrutiny. "I am in hiding."

"Indeed? Well, sit down here, and have some breakfast first of all, and then tell me what the trouble is."

Katherine obeyed, and began to eat the baked apple over which Mrs. Hodgson had poured her best cream.

"It ought to be skimmed milk," groaned the girl.

"Why this humility? I fail to see that you have done anything to be ashamed of," said the other, seating herself comfortably. The Wise Woman was one who always paid other people's homes the subtle compliment of behaving as if their surroundings fulfilled her every desire.

"That is because Mr. Sheldon did n't peach."

"Explain yourself. Open confession is good."

"I would go out to the buoys. He tried to persuade me not to."

Miss McKnight smiled musingly. "Fritz is always level-headed. I have had a soft spot in my heart for him ever since we first met. It is rapidly spreading over the whole extent of that organ, and I only hope it can be restrained from attacking the brain."

"I 'm glad you appreciate him," said Katherine, busy opening an egg. She looked up suddenly. "You were there, dear Wise Woman, when he brought me in. You must have heard the things mother said to him," the girl's lips tightened, while her eyes filled; "and here I sit eating *eggs!*" she finished.

"Just the right thing to do, my dear. One duty at a time. Eggs happen to be the first one this morning."

"Well, that 's why I 'm in hiding. I am a little afraid of the Hodgsons, more afraid of Mr. Sheldon, and mortally afraid of Marguerite! You can appreciate why I want to get under the bed and stay there!"

"Poor Fritz! Fate gives him some pretty hard knocks," said Miss McKnight. Doubtless Katherine was aware of the fact which Mrs. Ormond communicated a couple of days before, and which had been coloring the Wise Woman's thoughts ever since.

"His sister thinks he is lucky, usually," returned Katherine dejectedly.

"Providence knows best," said the other quietly, "but I don't take Fritz's great disappointment very philosophically. A short-sighted mortal like myself would give such a man, one who is not capricious or shallow, the woman he wants. Even if the girl is not just the one I would choose for him, I should feel certain he would do her good."

The cocoa Katherine was drinking suddenly met some obstruction in her throat, which vigorously disputed the right of way. She choked, and set down her cup.

Lifting a glass of water, she drank, taking some time between the sips.

"Want to be patted on the back?" asked Miss McKnight laughingly.

"It is all right now," returned the other, but the sudden color faded from her face, and her visitor noted for the first time that the excitement of yesterday had left its traces.

"Of course, if Mr. Sheldon is struggling with a great trial of that nature," said the girl, pushing back from the table, "yesterday's pin-pricks would not affect him much. I can comfort myself with that thought." She did not meet the older woman's eyes as she spoke, and the latter thought she understood the evasion.

"Don't hesitate to speak out, my dear. Your mother confided in me."

"About what?"

"Madeline and Fritz."

Katherine looked at her companion now, and her face warmed again.

"Is that what you were talking about, a minute ago?"

"To be sure." Miss McKnight wondered at the expression, unsympathetic to say the least, which grew on her young friend's countenance.

Katherine's eyes made an approach to the fa-

miliar twinkle. "That is ancient history," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"That happened two years ago, when they met down here. I don't know how serious it was. It was only a matter of two weeks."

"Katherine, you make me feel ten years younger!"

The two smiled at each other, then the girl moved back to the table. "Why, I am not through breakfast, am I? And oh, dear, I have to get back under the bed again!"

"What exasperates me," said Miss McKnight reflectively, "is the number of unnecessary vibrations my nerves of sympathy have undergone."

"It is very odd, but mother must have misunderstood. Perhaps Madeline threw out some hints, and did n't explain the whole matter."

"Humph!" returned the Wise Woman.

Katherine's cocoa went down this time unhindered.

Marguerite, knowing what visitor was upstairs, did not attempt to go at once to see Katherine.

"It looks bad, her not coming down?" said Fritz interrogatively, as he paused on the piazza to speak with his sister after breakfast.

"I dare say she feels a little lazy," returned Marguerite, "but it is easy to see from Mrs. Ormond's and Madeline's behavior that there is nothing very serious the matter with her."

Gilbert here came out on the piazza, leading

his mother with an air of some determination. They approached Fritz.

"I 've just been hearing from Madeline the true inwardness of yesterday's adventure," said Gilbert, "and the Ormond family wish to express their thanks in due form as well as sincerely." The young man kept an arm around his mother as he gave Sheldon's hand a hearty shake.

Mrs. Ormond cleared her throat. "I was under a misapprehension yesterday, which really seems very absurd now," she said. "Katherine was fortunate in having you with her. She" —

"Don't mention it," interrupted Fritz hastily, noting her embarrassment. "If Miss Katherine is not ill from the experience, there is nothing to regret in it."

"You just stick right by us, Sheldon," said Gilbert. "As a family life-preserver you give perfect satisfaction. We 've no wish to change."

Fritz smiled. "Very well; try to keep out of mischief this morning, though, for I am going to be busy. Good-by, Rita. I hope, Mrs. Ormond, that Miss Katherine will soon be downstairs."

"Thank you. I think she will."

"I haven't seen her since the fracas," said Gilbert. "I think I 'll go up and visit the interesting invalid. Come, mother."

"Miss McKnight is with her now."

"Yes, I know, but Madeline has gone up. I guess there will be room for two more. Shall you go to the beach after a while, Miss Marguerite?"

"I will think about it," replied the girl, leaning back against the pillows in the hammock; and then she was left alone.

She recalled Mrs. Ormond's face and manner during the recent interview, and smiled as she rocked herself gently, touching the toe of her slipper to the floor.

"Good morning," said a voice beside her. Jasper McKnight had approached noiselessly on the turf, and stood there leaning his arms upon the railing.

He offered her a daisy. "I thought the fields had entirely dropped the subject of Marguerite," he continued, "but I just happened to find this, blooming alone."

She accepted the flower, and drew its stem through her belt. "Thank you. I ought to be satisfied with daisies for one season."

"What is the programme to-day?"

"The usual delicious blank."

"That sounds well, but I think you are a rather energetic set."

"Indeed, and are you 'out of it'?"

"Oh, I follow the procession, of course, but I am never guilty of an idea."

"We are all tolerably blameless in that line. I had ideas enough, though, in the still, small hours last night," continued Marguerite with a significant nod, which Jasper received eagerly. Every approach to familiar friendliness from her to him was still a novelty. "I was in the waves all night, it seemed to me."

"Was it a pleasant experience?"

"At first; but"— She hesitated.

"Tell me all about it. I scent something exciting."

"Oh, it was exciting." Marguerite shuddered a little in the warm air. "I suppose I mixed our experience with Katherine's. You were lifting me above the waves, and it was great sport at first, but after a while you didn't come up, and —and then somehow you were lying on the sand —and they said you were dead, and I had done it, you know"— The girl bit her lip. "It was dreadful; I am foolish to remind myself. In the midst of the misery of it, while the Wise Woman was looking at me with awful eyes, I waked. Oh, such a relief; but all the same," the girl paused, and a fitful smile played over her lips, "I was glad to see you just now standing there before me in the flesh."

"I apologize humbly for making myself so disagreeable. We shall have to repeat yesterday's ducking, and wipe out the impression."

"I don't think I could let you," returned Marguerite quickly.

"Not when you know dreams go by contraries?" asked Jasper, unreasonably pleased by her solicitude.

"Oh, I feel as if the shock of yesterday's experience had brought everything to a standstill for a little while," she replied evasively.

"How is Miss Katherine this morning?"

"I have n't seen her yet, but I judge she is feeling pretty well."

"No need of me, then?"

"I don't know. Shall I go and ask?"

"No, indeed. Aunt Edna is with her, I believe. I told her I would follow in case I could do anything."

"Yes, your aunt is with her, and I have been sitting alone out here, feeling jealous."

Dr. McKnight's smile made his dark face bright. "Jealous of which one?"

"Surely," remarked Marguerite, "that confession of mine was rather cleverly ambiguous, was n't it? I did n't realize it when I made it. It will be more interesting to let it remain a conundrum."

"But I always guess conundrums."

Marguerite only smiled at Mr. Hodgson, who now walked around by the piazza, making her cheeks warm by the curious and lingering look which he bent upon the unconscious doctor's back.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Hodgson," said the latter, lifting his hat, as the old man passed within his range of vision.

"Good mornin'," was the cheery response. "Why ain't you with the sick one? Ain't nothin' wrong with Rita, is there?"

To Marguerite's supersensitive ears there was something direfully significant in the tone of this question.

"I don't know," called back the doctor good-

humoredly. "She has n't let me feel her pulse yet."

This answer seemed to strike Mr. Hodgson as unusually good. They could hear him chuckling aloud as he moved off.

Jasper turned back to Marguerite, and found her eyes confronting him with bright seriousness.

"Knowing that you and Katherine are intimate friends, and that you have n't seen her since yesterday," he said, "it does n't take a high order of intelligence to perceive that you are jealous of my aunt for getting in ahead of you this morning. See?"

Marguerite laughed in her relief that he had not thought twice about uncle Silas. "I do see that you are a very clever personage. Accept my congratulations."

"So it *is* Katherine you are jealous of," said Jasper in a different tone. "I thought so all the time. I mean I hoped so; but I wanted to make sure."

Marguerite colored. "Why did you hope so?"

"Oh, because I like to have you fond of aunt Edna."

"But it is degrading to be jealous of Katherine. She came first, and ought to come first. Promise me you won't tell the Wise Woman."

"She would be complimented."

"No, don't tell her; I am not joking about it. I will tell you one other thing, a real secret this

time. You know it has been said that a woman always tells a secret because she has to get some one to help her keep it."

"I 've a positive talent for keeping secrets," averred Jasper. "Even as a baby I refused to cry if there was a pin sticking into me, I was so instinctively secretive."

"Then I am sure I can trust you. It is only this; that I am jealous by nature."

"I can sympathize, for I am another!"

"I never confessed it, even to Fritz; but that is why you must n't betray me to the Wise Woman."

"Do you believe love can exist without jealousy?" asked Jasper.

Marguerite hesitated a moment, surprised. "Yes," she replied at last.

"But I am talking now about love between a man and a woman."

"So am I, — yet I know nothing about it."

"Does n't the fact of love necessarily include the possibility of jealousy?" persisted Jasper.

"Yes."

He gave her a bright look, which was too serious for smiles.

"Yet you are right," he said. "I, too, believe love may exist without jealousy."

His ardent look mastered hers. The long seconds passed, and he did not speak, and her wits seemed paralyzed. It was an ineffable relief to her when the screen door slammed and Gilbert

Ormond appeared. He had hesitated for a moment, regarding the tableau on the piazza, before making his noisy entrance.

"Good morning, Jasper."

"Good morning," returned McKnight, lifting the hat which had set negligently back from the crisp, dark hair above his forehead. "I hear I have no business over here this morning."

"No, Katherine is all right, and even my digestion is getting into shape. I haven't told you before, Miss Marguerite, — I didn't want you to lose any sleep fretting about me, — but when I first came down here the last coat was off my stomach, and it was doing its work entirely in its shirt-sleeves."

"Miss Laird has n't asked me to sit down," said Dr. McKnight.

"Oh, please do," said the girl, at ease again.

"So I think I will go and hunt up aunt Edna. I must pay my respects to Miss Katherine."

When he had gone into the house, Gilbert sat down in a chair and, staring out across the fields, appeared to fall into reverie.

Marguerite rocked softly in the hammock and watched him; but she saw him no more than he did her.

At last a sigh broke from him which recalled her. "A penny for your thoughts," she said.

"You would think you made a poor bargain if I sold them," he rejoined.

"I am sorry if you are in any trouble," she

returned, after a moment of surprise at his changed and constrained manner.

"That is easy enough," he said roughly.

His tone astonished and hurt her. He saw it in her face.

He started up, approached the hammock, and took her passive hand in his.

"I won't ask you to forgive me," he said, looking pale, then went on, unconscious that he was driving her ring into her finger. "You have no right to forgive me. I won't be such a fool as to ask a question when I know the answer to it, but I 'm trying to turn my feeling for you the other side out. If you get hurt sometimes, why, that is n't much for you to bear." The low, quick speech stopped. He released her hand, swung himself over the railing, and walked off across the field.

Before he had gone far, he met Mr. Hodgson. "I seen ye git out o' that piazza," said the old man, nudging him and chuckling. "Three 's a crowd, ain't it, hey? Rita says that there doctor ain't sparkin' her. Hain't I got eyes? He, he, he! Sticks to that porch of our'n like a sick kitten to a hot brick. Rita shets me up and" —

"Of course, of course," interrupted Gilbert. "Mum 's the word. It is n't the thing to tease a girl like that, you know. Better shut right up, just as she says. Don't see anything, don't hear anything. That 's the best way. I 'm trying at it myself. Good-by, I 'm off for a sail," and he strode away, whistling.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SIREN.

THE open and flattering admiration which Gilbert Ormond had exhibited all winter toward Marguerite Laird had seemed to her the reverse of portentous. Her attitude toward him in return had differed from her treatment of other men. Her easy responsiveness had never misled Gilbert, and until coming to Pokonet this summer, he had assured himself that he was satisfied with her friendship.

It was seeing Jasper McKnight with her, and catching with the quickness of jealousy certain expressions in his face, which caused the repressed flame to leap up. Gilbert had startled Marguerite grievously just now. She sat quiet after he had gone, and carefully analyzed her own past conduct. Her conscience acquitted her, if only on the proof of the genuine surprise he had given her. Lightning could not have been more unexpected out of a clear sky than such looks and words from the perennially gay young man.

Strangely enough, Marguerite's thoughts did not cling long to Gilbert, but fled to Katherine. Could the latter know the humility and timidity,

equal to her own, which filled her friend's breast at the present moment, her dread of confronting her would be removed.

Marguerite recalled the never-to-be-forgotten look on Fritz's face yesterday, there by the Life Saving Station. The new idea that he cared for Katherine had excited her. She had not forgotten his declaration of the past autumn that he had done with love. Unimportant as such an assertion would be on the lips of most young men, with Fritz it was different. So wonted was she to crediting his well-weighed words, she was far from sure yet whether yesterday's radiant look had meant more than an expression of the hearty and exceptional friendship she knew he felt for Katherine.

Supposing, however, that the most a man can feel for a woman had been indicated by the significant words and manner. Hard as the lesson would be in the beginning, to learn to take second place with Fritz, who else in all the world could she so willingly see in the first as her sweet and gracious friend? If Fritz wanted Katherine, he must have her. Must he? Marguerite's heart quickened, and her color came, as she lay there alone in the hammock. Katherine doubtless felt for Gilbert all that she herself did for Fritz. She had the right to harbor toward Marguerite all the grief and resentment which the latter would assuredly suffer if her brother were doomed to disappointment.

As Marguerite reflected upon this, her state of mind was such that Katherine might have appeared upon the piazza with a manner as arrogant as her mother's, and Miss Laird would not have resented it. Marguerite hoped that Gilbert had not made a confidante of any of his family, and she did not believe that he had. If he would only keep up the good work of concealment, how grateful she should be to him.

When Jasper McKnight entered the house after leaving Marguerite, the light in his countenance was good to see. Madeline, who heard his voice inquiring for Katherine, came downstairs to receive him.

How full of life's gladness his face looked. She did not remember ever before to have seen him like this.

"Poor fellow, how pleased he is to find me!" she thought, as he gave her hand an extra pressure. After all, there was nobody like Jasper. Madeline felt a delicious anticipation of a life exactly suited to her tastes and ambitions, as she greeted him. What mattered the Deweys of the world, the moths who fluttered about her? Dr. McKnight embodied the substantial benefits which she demanded of the future.

"And I used to consider her the most attractive girl I knew," Jasper was thinking meanwhile. A memory of some of his aunt's gently satirical words and looks came back to him vaguely, as he sat listening to Madeline's chatter.

"Whatever you gave Katherine yesterday acted like magic," she said, as they sat together in the old low-ceiled parlor. "She always was a sleepy girl, but I began to think she would rival the famous seven; and she seems so refreshed and like herself this morning, only blue. You don't know how odd it seems to have Katherine blue."

"Indeed? Depression is a symptom with such people. Perhaps I could help her."

"No;" Madeline shook her head archly. "It is not a case for you. Shakespeare says so many clever things about a mind diseased, and disordered looks, and all that. I can't remember one of them to quote, I never can when I want to, but any way, Katherine's mind is the trouble. She is crushed to think she insisted on going to the buoys against Mr. Sheldon's advice, and then made such a failure of it. Mr. Sheldon is the only physician she needs. She is in ashes now, but after he has forgiven her, she will rise like a phœnix."

"Her recovery is certain, then," returned the doctor. "Sheldon's regard for your sister would stand a pretty heavy strain, I fancy." He smiled at Madeline. She no doubt had noticed the same signs which had impressed him.

"Why, of course Katherine is foolish to fret about it," she returned. "You men like to forgive us, don't you? You enjoy the sensation of superiority it gives you. Don't deny it."

"It takes considerable courage to contradict you," laughed Jasper, "but if you want candor, I

must express a doubt as to whether we can ever cheat ourselves into even a momentary belief in our superiority to a conundrum which we can never solve."

Madeline's bright eyes regarded him curiously. "Are we girls all conundrums to you? You are not all conundrums to us."

"I should say not. We are humbly aware that you read us from the first like an open book."

The girl laughed. "'You do protest too much.' There, that 's Shakespeare, and I 'm awfully proud of myself. Some of you are anything but open books." She turned serious. "You, for instance. You are a very contradictory person. I don't always know where to find you."

Supposably, the speaker meant this assertion metaphorically; but Dr. McKnight had some ado to avoid all betrayal of embarrassment. He was so uneasily conscious, that of late it had been literally true. For some time now he had been mentally divided between self-gratulation that he had never gotten in any deeper with pretty Madeline, and a chivalrous doubt as to whether he was treating her fairly. He was aware that friends had coupled their names, and he only hoped, with a sincerity which had in it no egotism, that she entertained for him the same superficial sentiments which he had discovered to be the extent of his own regard for her.

"Now, you cannot pretend that I am a problem to you," added the girl, lifting her chin saucily.

"Aren't we exceptions to the rule?" he returned. "Our lifelong friendship should count for something."

"It should count for a great deal," answered Madeline, with a gentle change of manner. She lowered her eyes. The time had come. The surroundings were not as she had fancied them. It was nearer noonday than midnight. The moonlit beach was replaced by the cool, old-fashioned parlor, but there was something not unpicturesque in its quaintness. She was not too excited to be conscious of her own effective pose in the big chintz chair where she nestled, and she was not clairvoyant to see what a different picture obstinately presented itself to her companion's mind, wherein he noted that a cambric waist can match in color a pair of blue eyes, and that the solitary daisy clinging against said waist recalled all the pretty things he had ever heard about innocence and a heart of gold.

"It — it does count for a great deal," said Jasper, with probably more awkward hesitation than his manner had ever been guilty of.

Madeline believed that he needed encouragement.

"It seems odd now to recall the time when you seemed to me such a big boy to admire and look up to. You went away leaving me that memory, and then one day came back a man; not — not our Jasper McKnight any longer."

The young doctor would have needed to be a

very timid lover not to have been inspired by the manner in which Madeline finished her sentence.

He grew very uncomfortable, and laughed, to hide his sensations. "Grown in one way, but how pitifully dwindled in another," he returned. "Unfortunately, the little girl and her standards had grown too."

"Unfortunately?" Madeline repeated the word with sweet and lingering reproach.

"Why, yes, for my hope of inspiring awe."

"Is that the feeling you are ambitious to arouse?" The girl asked the question with a caressing intonation, and shyly lifted her eyes. "You are a conundrum to me," she returned, "and I am tempted" — what a delicious pause if (ah, that if!) he had been her lover — "to give you — up."

Her color rose softly, and she was bewitching. Dr. McKnight was conscious of her charm in a strange, external, regretful way.

He felt more condemned than was just. What was there to say? He took desperate refuge in compliment, his one consolation being that it was not empty.

"The combination of you and that chair makes me wish myself an artist!" he exclaimed, after a pause. "If you were on the beach now, you would not need to exert yourself to comb your hair and sing; we should have some brave vessel stranded inside half an hour." Madeline's lowered eyes rose to his with a new expression.

For him the siren's spell was broken, and she perceived it. Once more he felt himself equal to the situation. "You surprise me, Miss Madeline, by considering me a conundrum. I really don't deserve the implication of subtlety."

The girl's fingers tapped the flowered arm of her chair. Dr. McKnight's tone enlightened her more unmistakably than his words. Her revulsion of feeling was extreme, and her nature so undisciplined that it was a question how serviceable her pride would be to her in this exigency.

"You are helping me to understand you better," she said. "I do not need to be told in words that you are not the friend to me you used to be. I suppose I have your aunt to thank for that. A Wise Woman undoubtedly. It is not for me to question her wisdom."

"Miss Madeline!" Dr. McKnight's tone sounded shocked, and he groaned mentally. She would refuse then to accept a tacit and peaceful ending to the interview. "I hope you don't really believe that," he added. "It is n't true."

Madeline gave a little laugh. "What less could you say?" she replied, with a shrug. "Oh, well, we have had a very good time together."

"No better than we shall have, I hope." His tone was very courteous, and although the position was excessively disagreeable, it was not moving. The sentiment looking out of Madeline's eyes not only was not love, it could not be concealing love.

"I believe you think I care for nothing in the world but flattery," she said, with a sudden burst of anger.

"You are a girl whom one is tempted to flatter," was the answer she received, soft enough to turn away wrath; yet softness was not indicated in Jasper's face as he said it.

It was consistent with her nature that he should never have seemed so attractive to her as now when he was subtly and inexorably removed from her. She did not deceive herself; she knew that if there ever had been a moment when she could have won him, the moment had passed. She would never be Mrs. Jasper McKnight of Woodrow Park. It was a name she had lately been fond of scribbling. Impotent grief and rage swelled in her, and there he sat, dignified, imperturbable, affected by none of the emotions that tormented her.

In the little pause during which they remained silent, Mrs. Ormond came to the door, saw them, and would have withdrawn; but Jasper was not so unperturbed as he looked. He perceived and grasped at her as a drowning man at a straw.

"Good morning, Mrs. Ormond," he said, rising precipitately to his feet, a point of vantage he had been longing for, and which he now vowed no persuasions should induce him to relinquish. Mrs. Ormond's quick eye detected storm signals.

"Come and take my part," he added. "Here

is your daughter accusing me of one thing and another, and threatening to give me up."

"Never mind, Jasper," returned the lady graciously, gliding up to him, and depriving him of his newly tasted sensation of freedom by slipping a hand through his arm. Mrs. Ormond was charmed to discover only a lovers' quarrel, and impatient for the moment to bestow her blessing. "When she gives you up, she gives me up," she declared gayly. "We stand or fall together."

Dr. McKnight would at that moment have exchanged all the rest of his sojourn at Pokonet for the safety of the warmest corner in Montaigne.

"As a conundrum, as a problem, she gave me up," he returned hastily. "Now I leave it to you, Mrs. Ormond," he disengaged himself under pretense of jocosely facing her for inspection, — "I leave it to you if I am an intricate individual."

She regarded him complacently. "I understand you well enough, my dear boy," she answered affectionately.

"Then good-by, Miss Madeline," he said, with a gay show of triumph. "I will leave while I am in favor."

"Good-by," she returned, rising languidly, and meeting his look with a little satirical smile.

When the screen door had slammed after him, her mother turned to her with a laughing, coaxing expression.

"Tell me all about it, you spoiled child," she

said, with a little affected air she was very apt to assume when Fortune was especially flattering.

Madeline had sunk back in her chair dispiritedly. She regarded her mother in silence. A sentiment of sincere regret for her helped to chain her tongue.

"You are a silly girl, after all, Maidie. The amusement of playing fast and loose in this instance may be dangerous."

"I 'm sorry for you, mother," was the only reply.

"Madeline!" Mrs. Ormond actually turned pale. Then she flushed angrily. "Was that brave fellow hiding something? If you have refused him, too, after all that has gone, I must say it, — you are a fool!"

The girl shook her head. Her fires seemed to have burned out. "Better not call names," she said. "It is all over."

"If you don't tell me what you mean, I 'll shake you," ejaculated her mother vigorously, seating herself near and putting a trembling hand on Madeline's arm.

The girl drew back, and her eyes filled. "Have n't I told you enough? Do you suppose I enjoyed the scene so much that I want to rehearse it?"

"But I can't understand. You did n't refuse him?"

"No."

"Then he did n't propose."

Madeline shook her head.

"What of it?" Mrs. Ormond asked the question with a nervous energy that would not be put off.

"Everything. Everything led up to it. If he had cared anything — he would have. Oh, don't argue it, mother." The girl's voice rose painfully. "I have seen men in love. Don't you suppose I know?"

Mrs. Ormond sat back in her chair, and they looked at each other. Madeline was the first to speak.

"I am sorry you had set your heart on this. It makes it awkward and hard." The girl smiled with a shade of her old spirit. "But I am Madeline Ormond still, and you are not in a hurry to be rid of me at any price, are you?"

Mrs. Ormond ignored this. "Did you get any clue? Is there anybody else?"

"No one, so far as I know."

"Then, my dear, we can't tell what the future may bring." Mrs. Ormond pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. "I am so fond of Jasper."

Madeline gave a cynical smile. "You would better consider it a case of unrequited affection," she said. "I have been patient with you, mother, but unless you conceal all yearning for Dr. McKnight after this, I promise you I will be as rude to him as I know how."

Mrs. Ormond knew the sincerity of this quiet threat. She dropped her handkerchief, and became dejectedly thoughtful.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SWEETS AND SOURS."

DINNER must inevitably bring the members of the family together, so Katherine came downstairs a little before the hour for it.

Reconnoitring rather timidly through the door, she observed that Fritz had returned from his morning's work, and was lounging near his sister on the piazza.

Marguerite was now sitting in a rocking-chair with Mrs. Hodgson's stocking-bag in her lap, and darning assiduously. Katherine perceived that the time and place were all that could be desired for presenting her erring self and getting her humble pie neatly disposed of, so she conquered her shrinking and pushed open the screen door.

Marguerite looked up as her friend appeared, but Fritz sprang to his feet and came to meet her.

The girl scarcely smiled as she put her hand in his outstretched one.

"You still feel ill," were his first words.

"I shall until you have accepted my apologies," she answered meekly. "Marguerite, you are wit-

ness to my solemn promise never to" — his look embarrassed her, and she hesitated — "always to" —

"You hear, Rita," said Fritz, "she promises always to — obey me. Is n't that what you were going to say?"

"He means it," thought Marguerite, driving her needle with a nervous movement through the largest hole in Uncle Silas' sock.

"In the water, you know," added Katherine. "I promise to obey you in the water. The next headstrong proceeding I indulge in shall be on land. I swear it." She drew her hand away from Fritz, and went swiftly to his sister. "I 've been so afraid of you," she said naïvely. "I knew you would look at it just as I did. Forgive me, please. I 'll promise to be magnanimous to you some time when you put Gilbert in a hard place."

Fritz stood unconsciously smiling as he watched them. Katherine's arms were about Marguerite's neck, and her cheek pressed to hers. He did not even notice the color that surged over his sister's face at this exhortation; but he saw her hand go up to Katherine's clasped ones, and saw their lips meet in a kiss of peace.

"Hello, there ye are, Kitty," said Mr. Hodgson, with much satisfaction, joining the group. "I 've been lookin' fer ye. It 's the best day's work you ever did, Fritz, when you fetched Kittiwake out o' the water."

"I think so, too," answered Sheldon, as the girl released Marguerite, and the old man's rough hand caressed hers.

"Poor little bird with her wings all draggled," went on Mr. Hodgson. "When they brought ye home I was silly. Ma said I was; but I knowed that wa'n't the kind o' fun you come to Pokonet for. Now you remember, Kitty, you can't trust that old ocean only jest so far. Don't you go monkeyin' round exceptin' jest when Fritz is with ye. It happened lucky yesterday."

"I 've been promising Mr. Sheldon not to monkey around when he *is* with me."

"Well, that 's all right," returned Mr. Hodgson, with an obstinate air, "but Fritz wants to look out fer ye. Why, ye 're our little girl Kittiwake; ye know that, don't ye? When they fetched ye home yesterday it went through me like a knife. I 'm too old to go wallopin' 'round after ye now, but you belong to Ma and me, and so does Fritz. So, two an' two makin' four, Fritz belongs to *you*, and, McKnight or no McKnight, he hain't got any better business than to go 'round after ye and see 't ye don't git into any trouble."

Katherine's cheeks reddened under this emphatic address, for, though she looked at the speaker, she felt another pair of eyes upon her.

"You are exactly right, Uncle Silas," said Sheldon. "You have a knack of getting at the kernel of things."

The old man looked complacent, and patted Katherine's shoulder.

Marguerite's heart swelled at the expression on her brother's face, and the threads in the lattice she was weaving ran together before her clouded vision.

"Here comes Gilly," remarked Mr. Hodgson, looking out toward the field. "Lobster, Gilly," he roared.

"Where?" returned the young man excitedly, beginning to race toward the house, and not pausing until he had vaulted over the rail into their midst, where he struck a dramatic attitude.

"You jest foller yer nose," said Mr. Hodgson. "I 'll back ye to find Ma's lobster, no matter how tight she covers it. There 's the bell, now."

As they were moving into the house, Gilbert and Marguerite were last to go in. He held the door open for her, and met her eyes gravely as she passed. "I am duly repentant," he said.

She gave him a gentle look. "Thank you," she answered.

Mrs. Ormond's motherly thoughts were not so absorbed in Madeline's affairs that she had not eyes to perceive that of late something was wrong, or if not wrong, at least changed, with her idolized son. The difference was subtle, but she felt it all the same, and knew it was not a desirable one. Poor Mrs. Ormond. The world was not turning around to suit her at all. Reproached by loving, easy-going Katherine, puzzled and worried by Gil-

bert, so vitally disappointed by Madeline that she could scarcely grasp the fact, little wonder, that she waxed restless and longed for change.

She and Gilbert sat alone on the steps of the farmhouse after supper that evening, and she scrutinized him covertly. "Are n't you growing tired of Pokonet?" she asked after a silence, during which her son had sat apparently deep in thought.

"Tired of it?" he returned, rousing himself. "Why, no. I am sure there is no better place for rest."

"That is n't all young people look for in a resort. I should think you would want more recreation than you can find in this dull place."

Gilbert smiled. "Do you think I should prefer to be getting ready for a hop at some hotel, rather than to sit here and watch the sunset with you?"

"It would be very natural that you should."

"You don't know me," returned the young man, deliberately changing his posture and lying down with his head in his mother's lap.

Mrs. Ormond's hand smoothed his hair. "What do you all see in Pokonet?" she asked plaintively.

"Lots to see here this year," he answered. "We 're gay. Did n't you know it, mother? Gay."

"I 'm not, and — neither are you, my son."

"Certainly I am. I 've a little different way

of showing it, perhaps, from ten years ago; but you ought not to complain of that. I sha'n't carry home such a quantity of riddled clothing."

"You have something on your mind, Gilbert, and I would give anything if you would tell me what it is."

The young man did not speak at once, and when he did, his irrelevance surprised her.

"Do you think Madeline is a flirt?"

"My dear!"

"Do you think she purposely draws men on to their doom? I've seen and heard things in a vague way. There have been two or three fellows come to grief on her account. Prides herself on it, does n't she?"

"What girl would n't enjoy her own power to charm?" returned Mrs. Ormond defensively.

"Then you encourage her," said Gilbert dryly. "What a monstrous thought."

"My son, what possesses you? You are not like yourself."

"No, I have a new insight into some things of late, and it has made these questions regarding Madeline occur to me. Decency deters a girl from talking much about such triumphs, I suppose, but rumors and hints of Madeline's have reached me, and I have taken it indifferently enough. Only of late I have suspected what it means to care for a girl, and to know that it is of no use. It occurred to me how savage it might make a man to find that while he had been in

earnest, the other party had been playing him. I wondered if Madeline had disgraced herself in that way."

"My dear boy, you don't mean what you are saying, coupling the word disgrace with your sister's name."

"I do couple it with the name of any girl, my sister or any other fellow's, who stoops to that sort of business. How should you feel toward a girl whose vanity induced her to make that sort of victim of me? Supposing that she made me think of her the last thing at night and the first in the morning; that she led me on until every other interest of my life was merged in the thought of her and the hope of spending my life for her and with her; and, when the climax was reached, she demurely waked me to the bald fact that, in spite of all my dreams, I was nothing to her."

"Gilbert, is this true?" Mrs. Ormond's voice, though low, was sharp.

"No. 'S'posin' a case, s'posin' a case,' as Mr. Hodgson says."

"I don't want to suppose such a case. It gives me the heartache. No one," Mrs. Ormond leaned fondly over the blond head in her lap, — "no one could lead you on like that, Gilbert. You would see through such a wretched girl; and I don't think, my dear, it is very brotherly in you to suspect poor Madeline of such cold-blooded behavior."

Gilbert was silent for a moment before speak-

ing. "I wish she had a direct, honest, unaffected manner like Marguerite's."

"Indeed?" returned Mrs. Ormond coldly. "It would be strange if Madeline Ormond's manner did not compare favorably with Marguerite Laird's."

"Not for a moment," returned Gilbert, with exasperating deliberation. "It can't compare with it for a moment. I am a plebeian who has never had the advantage of mingling with members of the nobility, but, according to my ideas of what such a thing should be, Marguerite Laird has the true grand air."

Mrs. Ormond gave a short, unmirthful laugh. "It is strange that I have never been able to see the marvelous attractions of that young woman."

"It *is* strange how you have always disliked her."

"I don't know why I should dislike her," responded Mrs. Ormond, more coldly still.

"I wish," said Gilbert quietly, "that I had inherited that taste of yours along with the shape of your nose and mouth."

"It is n't necessary to *dislike* her," responded his mother, rather puzzled.

"No; but it would be comfortable."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Ormond in sudden alarm.

"Nothing, except that Marguerite has earned your esteem from this time forth."

"Gilbert — my son, you are making my heart

palpitate. Oh," with an apprehensive groan, "that girl! Always that girl! What has she done now?"

"Nothing, except to be her own gracious, graceful self."

"You frightened me so! I feared — why, you spoke so strangely, I actually for a moment had the wild thought that she might have refused you."

"No, I would n't put her to that annoyance."

There was silence for half a minute after the simple reply. Mrs. Ormond was mute and pale. At last she spoke, a great anxiety clamoring in her breast and making her voice unsteady.

"You know, my dear son, that in any trouble of yours, from the smallest to the greatest, you can be sure of your mother's sympathy; but are you sure — how can you be sure beforehand of Miss Laird's feeling for you?"

"The same way that Madeline's lovers might have been sure of hers for them, had she been true and unselfish."

Mrs. Ormond's anxiety changed to jubilation, which made her deaf to the slur upon her pet. Here was one bitter cup which might have been hers, but from which she had escaped. Her only son was mad enough to wish to give her this most undesirable daughter-in-law, and by a miracle the girl herself held back.

"Surely, then, dear boy," she said gently, "you would better leave Pokonet, and at once."

"No, I will stay. I have looked the situation

in the face, and know the work that is cut out for me. I 'll begin it right here."

"I would keep every trial from you if I could, dear," said his mother.

He smiled as he patted her hand. He knew what was passing in her mind.

"You can't expect all your children to marry to suit you," he remarked. "That does n't often happen in families."

"I don't suppose I can," she answered, willing, in her relief, to yield to this vague suggestion. "I am sure I have had a great deal of anxiety about Madeline," she added plaintively. "Have you seen anything to criticise in her treatment of Jasper McKnight?"

"No. When he seemed to be the leading gentleman last winter, I had not passed into the critical stage."

"But I mean this summer — down here."

Gilbert gazed off into the twilight. "Oh, here, Madeline's fluttering and twittering did n't matter much either way. Jasper has a talisman which makes him invulnerable."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Then I can't tell you, mother," rejoined the young man, with a sigh.

Mrs. Ormond would have liked to pursue the subject, for Gilbert's assertion roused her curiosity; but the thought of Madeline restrained her, and, after all, Gilbert could do nothing to alter existing circumstances.

"I am quite ready to go away from Pokonet," she remarked, echoing the sigh.

Nevertheless, the next morning found her in her accustomed place on the beach, which was quite populous now at this hour. She sat in the sand, leaning against her wooden support, shielding her head with her parasol, and regarding the scene rather listlessly.

Only when her eyes encountered Marguerite, their expression changed. It did not increase Mrs. Ormond's regard for the girl to dwell upon the thought that the latter was aware of Gilbert's passion for her. On the contrary, each time Marguerite in her white sailor hat passed within her range of vision, vexation and humiliation made tumult in her heart, in spite of the constantly recalled fact that things might have been much worse.

"Glorious morning, Mrs. Ormond," said a hearty voice beside her, to the accompaniment of the breaking waves.

She looked up, and saw Dr. McKnight. The sight was scarcely more agreeable than Miss Laird's fair, unconscious face.

"Oh, good morning. If a cloud would pass over the sun, it would be a relief to the eyes."

"It *is* dazzling." He dropped down on the sand beside her. "It seems to me our people are lazy about going in this morning."

"Yes; but there is quite a sea on." Mrs. Ormond made a heroic endeavor to address the

new-comer with exactly her usual manner; but he must have been preoccupied if he did not remark that something of the maternal accent had departed from her tone.

"When your daughters stay out, I think it may be discouraging to a good many timid ones." Some unavowed sensation of delinquency made Jasper desirous of establishing himself in his friend's good graces this morning, and his manner was a nice combination of frankness and deference.

"That is quite unnecessary, I am sure," returned Mrs. Ormond. "The girls have always been very capricious about it, and go in or not, just as they happen to feel."

"Miss Madeline seems to have found a safe way of going to sea." Dr. McKnight smiled as he looked off a few rods to where, in a boat drawn up on the beach, Madeline and Mr. Dewey sat and chatted.

Mrs. Ormond did not deign an answer. He had forfeited the right to speak Madeline's name.

"Good morning. Why this lack of enterprise?" added Jasper, starting to his feet as Katherine and Marguerite approached, arm in arm.

Mrs. Ormond glanced disapprovingly at the three happy faces as greetings were exchanged, and then all sat down again in the sand.

"Will you kindly move a little to one side, Miss Marguerite," she said, at no pains to sweeten her tone. "I was watching the bathers."

"Oh, excuse me," exclaimed the girl, precipitately changing her position to Jasper's other side.

"What has happened to annoy mother?" thought Katherine; but by this time she had hardened herself to bear the brusque manner in which Mrs. Ormond treated her friend at most unexpected times and seasons. She had a half-uneasy sense of Marguerite's estimate of her mother, and in her loyal love for the latter, it was a regret to her.

"But in this world one cannot have everything," mused Katherine; and this conclusion, as well as her happy face, blooming each day into greater attractiveness, went to prove that whatever minor satisfaction might be lacking, life was giving her much.

"I have just been calling you timid," said Jasper to Marguerite, "because you don't take a dip."

"A great mistake," she replied gayly. "You selected the wrong girl. Katherine quakes this morning when she even looks at the waves. I am staying out merely to keep her in countenance."

"I deny the quaking," remarked Katherine. "Call me lazy, and I will admit it at once. I like to see other people make an exertion this morning. Did you ever race sand-fleas, Dr. McKnight?"

Upon Jasper's disclaiming any such sporting experience, the girl drew a circle in the sand,

making a slight depression in the centre of the miniature arena.

"Choose your flea," she said, her own hand coming down upon a good-sized specimen of the semi-transparent little creatures bounding and burrowing about them.

"Which are the swifter, the large ones or the small?" inquired the doctor seriously.

"As if I should tell you! Marguerite, do you want to come into the race?"

"Not if I have to pick up one of those tiny lobsters in my hand."

"Then stay out, faint-heart. Who called me timid a few minutes ago? Now put your flea right in the middle of the circle, Dr. McKnight, beside mine, and the one that jumps across the line first, wins. I tell you beforehand, mine is a regular kangaroo. I saw it in his eye when I picked him up. Marguerite, you are my mascot, and mother, you will be Dr. McKnight's. Here, come out of there!" this to her flea, who remained, apparently in reverie, in the valley out of which his companion was energetically struggling.

Mrs. Ormond darted a withering glance at the crown of her child's sailor hat. She, sore with injuries of Jasper McKnight's inflicting, to be flippantly dubbed his mascot in an idiotic flea race! It was too much.

"He 's coming, Katherine," said Marguerite, with enthusiasm. "Now, *now!*" for the tardy insect cleared his way with a short leap half way

to the encircling ring. Once there, however, his energy appeared spent, and he remained motionless, staring with starting eyes seaward.

"Did n't you ever notice the ocean before?" Katherine demanded of him. "It 's been there all the time. Oh, go on, you old gravel-train!"

This apostrophe appeared to have an effect, for the flea jumped, but short of the mark; while Jasper's cleared the boundary with a flying leap.

"Hurrah for our side!" said the doctor, waving his hat. Mrs. Ormond could not refuse the hand he offered her in gratitude for her services.

Madeline and her admirer had left the boat meanwhile, and after standing half a minute in close conversation, they parted. Madeline came up to her friends just as her mother and Jasper were apparently exchanging congratulations.

"Your mother is a most efficient mascot, Miss Madeline," he announced, and the girl regarded the signs in her mother's flushed face with curiosity. At any rate, Mrs. Ormond was putting a most commendable restraint upon herself, and her youngest smiled approvingly as she sank upon the sands beside her.

"Why did n't Mr. Dewey come and bid us good morning?" asked Mrs. Ormond hastily, to prevent any inquiries Madeline might be led into making.

"He has to go home and pack."

"Going away?"

"Yes; the old story, business. He is so dis-

gusted, and so am I," added Madeline, for she and her mother were practically *tête-à-tête*, Dr. McKnight having turned again toward his girl companions. "He was lots of fun," went on Madeline regretfully. She looked thoughtfully out to sea a minute, then added: "Why do we stay in Pokonet any longer?"

"I am quite ready to go," returned Mrs. Ormond promptly and impressively. "I can only regret that we came at all."

"But look at Katherine," remarked Madeline. "Did you ever see anything like the way she flourishes here?"

"She would be just as well elsewhere," rejoined Mrs. Ormond shortly. She looked critically, not at her elder, but at her younger daughter. She had so long taught herself to believe that Madeline regarded Dr. McKnight as she wished her to, that she looked upon her present indifference in wonder. How could it be that recent events had made so little impression upon the girl that she could sit here within a stone's throw of Jasper, and apparently forget his existence. To the mother's eyes the pretty face bore evidence of strain. All pleasant excitement and vivacity had for the moment died out of it, and left the eyes listless and the lips drooping.

"Let us leave Pokonet," said Mrs. Ormond abruptly.

Madeline returned her look with a curious expression. "Yes, all in good time," she answered,

in a low voice. She glanced at Dr. McKnight's back. "It would n't do to go immediately," she added.

Mrs. Ormond followed the direction of her glance with just indignation. That young man might learn to know himself better after they had gone away. She drew a sudden and gratifying mental picture of Jasper McKnight, pensively musing on the fact that a subtle charm of land and sea had departed with Madeline Ormond.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BONFIRE.

"Do you know how you are wasting time?" asked Fritz Sheldon, coming into the Hodgsons' sitting-room one evening, and finding the family assembled. Miss McKnight and her nephew were also present. Sheldon and his employer had returned that day from a two weeks' stay in Newark, and in their respective ways, each was joyful to be back again.

"There 's a bit of a moon, I don't say it gives much light," continued Fritz, taking from his pocket the bunch of letters he had just brought from the post-office. For an absent-minded man, he showed remarkable forethought in transferring the one addressed to Katherine to the bottom of the pile, so that in their distribution she came last, and he naturally took a seat near her. "But this is no evening to stay in the house, it is so pleasant and clear. I have been busy nearly all day, and I want to play. What do you say to building a bonfire on the beach?"

"Come on," said Gilbert, springing up with alacrity.

"I 'm sure it must be damp," objected Mrs.

Ormond, who had been so far watching in vain for an opportunity to secure an interview with Katherine and Gilbert. She and Madeline had been reading a letter from Mrs. Allington, and found it to contain an urgent invitation, so alluring that she could not wait to have the matter settled with the others. Even though Gilbert had expressed his desire to remain in Pokonet, she thought it more than likely that this definite plan would attract him.

But now the room was in a pleasant tumult. Only Madeline looked doubtful and a trifle bored. The element which would have lent spice to the episode, namely, a masculine admirer, was lacking. Fritz Sheldon, in spite of his promising external, she had decided was come to be a most prosaic and poky individual. Very likely she herself had had a large share in making him so, but the fact remained. As for Jasper — Madeline resolutely turned away from the thought of Jasper.

"You are coming, of course, Miss Madeline," he said, breaking in upon her doubts with a smile and that air of repressed exhilaration which she had perceived in him of late.

"He shall not think I am moping," she thought. "Oh, yes, I am going," she answered gayly, skipping away to get her wraps.

"You are coming, too, Aunt Edna," continued the young man.

"Not unless I am abducted, my dear. I am past the age that finds any warmth in starlight."

"You will allow us to go unchaperoned?" he said, turning laughingly to Mrs. Ormond.

"Yes," she replied, in a tone to which he was unaccustomed. "I have such confidence in your discretion, Jasper, that I do not consider that any company which includes you requires another chaperon." Then with a lighter manner she addressed Miss McKnight. "It should be a part of our vacation, don't you think so, Edna, not to have to play propriety?"

The young people started off in a jolly, straggling bunch, across the field. Katherine, with a quick movement, stepped forward and slipped her arm through her brother's.

"Hello," he said, looking around at her, "have I drawn you, Kitty?"

"Yes, are n't you satisfied?" She laughed happily from the sweet inner consciousness that another wanted her more.

"Who is ever satisfied?" he returned, but he gave her arm a little squeeze.

"No wonder you wanted to get us out of the house, Mr. Sheldon," said Madeline. "What a glorious summer night."

Fritz turned to reply to her, and Dr. McKnight seized his opportunity to fall in by Marguerite's side.

"So little wind," said Jasper contentedly; "just the night for a bonfire."

"If there happens to be plenty of driftwood," returned the girl.

"And if there does n't," the speaker's teeth flashed in the moonlight, "we shall be just as well satisfied."

"Oh, is that your optimistic frame of mind? You must speak for yourself. I want a fire."

Madeline and Fritz followed after. She was thinking what it would once have been to him to walk through this field with her under the clear stars. How strange that he should have become so stupidly uninteresting; there was really no more piquancy in a *tête-à-tête* with him than there would be with Gilbert. Repress all recollection as she would, however, she suffered from pique and hurt vanity at the sight of Dr. McKnight. He had seemed to enjoy himself quite as well with Marguerite Laird, of late, as he had ever done with herself. His laughter came back to her now, and its heartiness brought a pang. He had no regrets.

"The time may come," thought Madeline contemptuously, "when Marguerite will dislike to hear that laugh, too. He likes to amuse himself with her now, but he does n't mean to entangle himself with anybody."

They found the driftwood, and made their fire. The flames mounted high, their roar lost in the crash and hiss of the surf, and the company sat about in the fitful light.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Jasper of Marguerite. He was stretched on the sand beside her, in a position to lose nothing of the revealing gleams that flashed across her face.

"It is fine. I wish the Wise Woman had come."

"She could not have left her friend. Mrs. Ormond would have had to come, too," said Jasper; and after a hesitating pause they both laughed, like two children.

"I still wish for the Wise Woman," declared Marguerite firmly. "We would have kept her on our side of the fire" —

"I see," returned Jasper, as she waited, "and let the others have Mrs. Ormond. That is a fair division. There are four of them."

"You should n't be so observing," said Marguerite, after another pause. "I did n't know that others noticed her disapproval of me."

"I have grown to be observing where you are concerned."

The breeze sent a rosy gleam over the girl's face. She shrugged her shoulders. "I never enter a room where she is but that she makes me feel that I ought to say, 'Excuse me for living.'"

"Of course, you know she is jealous of you."

"No, I don't think that," replied Marguerite quietly, setting aside the implied compliment. "Fritz has reminded me that Mrs. Ormond has an important redeeming characteristic. She is Katherine's mother. I always keep that in mind, now."

"And Katherine is a very important person," said Jasper significantly.

"She is my best friend," returned Marguerite.

"Is that all you want me to see?" Jasper looked over at the quartette. Katherine still kept close to Gilbert; but guarding her other side was Fritz.

Marguerite changed her position and smiled faintly. "You remember the secret I told you once about myself?"

"That you were jealous?"

"Yes. Well, the green-eyed monster gives me some trouble of late. I know it is ungrateful — selfish — wrong; but there is only one Fritz, and he has always belonged to me."

"That is what aunt Edna says;" Jasper's tone changed and he spoke slowly. "She says Fritz fills your heart and eyes to such an extent that you do not see or consider other men. Such devotion to a brother is unusual — fortunately." He gave a short laugh. "You see I have no sister to idealize me."

Marguerite's heart moved a little quicker. "I don't idealize Fritz. I see his faults, I" —

"Yes, but faults or virtues, it is still Fritz," exclaimed Jasper impetuously; "he is all you see, when I am waiting and longing to have you see me." He lifted himself on his elbow and looked into her face.

"Oh, I am perfectly aware of you, Dr. McKnight," — began the girl, in a low voice.

"Perfectly?" he interrupted. "Then you know that I love you, Marguerite. I love you" — He stopped suddenly, then went on eagerly, "Will you come and walk on the beach?"

"No, stay here, please." He had half risen, holding out his hand to her.

"But we are not alone. Madeline Ormond is watching us."

"She cannot hear us," returned Marguerite, who was trembling a little. "You have spoken now, and you must be answered now."

"No, no, not yet. I spoke too soon. I should have waited until Fritz was further out of the field. You have not thought of me."

"Yes, I have thought of you." Jasper felt a sudden access of hope at the tone. "I have — suspected what you tell me." The gentle clearness of her voice, in spite of the evident effort it was to speak, filled her lover with a wild desire to kiss the hands lying loosely on her knee, but he felt Madeline's curious eyes upon him. The white foam hissed, and spread nearer and nearer to the leaping fire, and the "wh'sh, wh'sh" of the bare feet of the patrolman and the thud of his stick sounded monotonously across the shadowy, wet beach. "I thought at one time I should be worthy," she went on, "but on searching myself I found out my mistake."

Jasper had been listening breathlessly. "My darling!" he exclaimed. He rose on one knee. "Come, let us come away."

"No, no," uttered Marguerite, with a little gasp. "Right here. You have not heard me, heard my reasons."

"And I cannot. I am too happy."

"Oh, wait; you have no cause to be happy. You must listen. It was not you I cared for."

Jasper became rigid. "There is some one else?"

"Yes; I found out that I was deceiving myself. It was sweet to think you cared, — but that was because I had learned that Fritz was leaving me, and I was so lonely deep down in my heart. That was one of the things that made me believe I cared for you. It was n't you, you see, it was the being first to somebody that was so consoling, and — and deceptive."

"I understand; but I am willing, Marguerite, willing to be a makeshift." Jasper's fear was removed, and he spoke eagerly again.

"But that is not all."

"Ah, I wish it were," he ejaculated.

"I owe it to you to be perfectly frank, and there were other things that proved to me how far my feeling was from that which you deserved. I love" —

"Oh, Marguerite!" involuntarily.

"The Wise Woman" —

"Heavens!" amazedly.

"So much, that it is a great temptation to belong to her."

Dr. McKnight's heart began beating again in its rightful place. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Yes, your position; your money; your home. They all attracted me."

"Then take them, in mercy!" he returned tenderly.

"How can you suggest it?" exclaimed Marguerite, tears in her voice.

The firelight showed her her lover's face, dark, yearning, yet half smiling. "You can't overlook these — these obstacles?" he asked gently.

"You do not take what I say seriously," returned the girl. "I am earnest. Let us forget all that has been said, and never refer to the subject again."

"Marguerite!" His voice had a tone that stirred her. "It is the one thing in my life that I never can forget. Forgive me, if my hope will not die. I may live down these objections. I won't trouble you, dear. I will try not to."

The girl drew a long breath. "I have been honest. He will not be deceived," she thought, and she was just going to warn him again that she had considered maturely, when a shriek and laugh from their neighbors announced that the tide had crept upon them unawares.

The fire died down. It had burned bravely. The patrolman plodded by and they hailed him. The wind sprang up and they all blew home before it; but Gilbert did not have Katherine's company going back.

Mrs. Ormond and Miss McKnight were sitting in the same place when the young people came breezily into the room. The former had been enjoying herself, for she had been descanting to her friend on the charms of the Allingtons' summer home at Bar Harbor, and reading to her the

cordial invitation which had arrived for Mrs. Ormond and all her brood. She was determined that Edna McKnight should know the consideration in which she and her children were held by such people.

Miss McKnight had confined herself to looking interested, nodding assent at intervals, and Mrs. Ormond had worked herself to a pitch of energetic enthusiasm which demanded the immediate settlement of plans.

She could ill brook Dr. McKnight's suggestion of Welsh rarebit, a suggestion noisily and hungrily assented to by his companions.

Miss McKnight laughed quietly at her protestations, and took up the paper, which she had laid down in order to listen to her friend's confidences. "Jasper probably finds business dull in Pokonet," she said. "He will have to see us all through, to-morrow."

"Aunt Edna, this hypocrisy pains me," retorted her nephew, on his way to the dining-room and the chafing-dish. "As if Welsh rarebit were n't your favorite 'wanity.'"

"Oh, I have had to strain my digestion up to the point of countenancing you, of course," returned Miss McKnight.

Mrs. Ormond grumbled and foreboded, but she ate a generous slice of the dainty, and at last, to her relief, Miss McKnight gave the longed-for sign.

"Come, Jasper, come. I can't wait any longer,"

called his aunt decisively. "It is my duty to see that you get some rest in the few days that remain to you."

Dr. McKnight looked vaguely toward the voice, and then back at Marguerite, by whom he was sitting. The girl was disturbed by his manner since their interview. It had all the unmistakable signs of these latter days, with something added which frightened her by its suggestion of the sweetness which life might hold, if only she truly and disinterestedly felt for him what he did for her.

"Come. You will want to bid the Wise Woman good night," he said, with a smile, "since she stands so high in your affections."

Marguerite looked at him seriously. "I hope you will not think it amusing to quote me to her," she said.

He shook his head slowly, looking down at her with a gaze which, for all her poise, she could not meet.

"I should not quote you to anybody," he replied. "I am miserly of every word you have ever addressed to me."

She made no reply to this.

"It might surprise you to know how glad I am that you love aunt Edna."

Here Marguerite did look up, with slow, questioning dignity. He went on: "She deserves it. There is no one like her. I am not jealous."

"Jasper!" Miss McKnight advanced to the

dining-room. "Don't you know these people want to go to bed? Good night, my girls."

Katherine and Madeline hurried forward and kissed her; then her brilliant eyes traveled to Marguerite, who advanced more slowly, and with an air of coldness to hide her embarrassment.

The Wise Woman saw the excitement in her nephew's face, and felt a little thrill.

She took the hand of the graceful, reluctant girl, but did not address her. "Good night, Fritz — Gilbert. How rich I am to have such a flock of nice children;" then, turning, she kissed Marguerite softly, and moved away.

When the house door had closed upon aunt and nephew, Katherine took Marguerite by both shoulders and held her against the wall.

"I will meet you at sunrise — behind the sand dunes," she said, frowning and smiling, "and it is to be to the death. You understand? The Wise Woman kissed you. She merely let Madeline and me kiss her. What do you mean by it? You came last. I won't stand it."

Marguerite's pale face had become crimson. She laughed, too, and her eyes were bright as with unshed tears.

Under the stars Miss McKnight was leaning on Jasper's arm, as they mutely walked the short distance home. He was so evidently unconscious of the silence that she did not break it.

At last he threw back his head and gave a short laugh.

"Supposing, aunt Edna, that justice to myself compelled me to go into bankruptcy."

Miss McKnight smiled in sympathy with his amusement.

"I should expect you to do it unflinchingly, my dear."

They had reached the farmhouse, and went up the steps. Jasper stood still and put his arms around his aunt, as he faced her. "But what if it became necessary also to put an end to you?" he added.

Miss McKnight peered up at him in the darkness, curiously. "Well," she returned; "I am certain you would do it as humanely as possible."

"I am sure she likes me," she thought in a flash. "Can she fear a severe case of aunt-in-law?"

"What enigmas you are talking," she added aloud. "Whose way am I in?"

"Mine, mine, aunt Edna. Only mine;" and Jasper kissed her as he spoke, in the impetuous fashion of his childhood.

"I will get out of it, dear, any time you tell me," she answered.

"Yes? Well, wait till I tell you. Wait till I am certain whether you are an obstacle, or a particularly irresistible bait."

"I don't understand why the old lady should figure at all," she remarked quietly.

"Then you are a sham after all, and not a Wise Woman. I've found you out."

Miss McKnight patted his arm. "I would like to help you, Jasper, to get every good thing you want."

"Well, I'm not sure of anything, aunt Edna. Never felt so impressed with the doubtfulness of uncertain things in all my life; but I think — I *think* you *are* helping me. Good night."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ormond's opportunity having at last arrived, she summoned her children to her own room.

"I have n't done anything, mother," said Katherine, her eyes dancing, as she pretended dread of some summary punishment.

"It is enough, I think, that I have to wait till all hours of the night before I can get a chance for a little quiet talk with my children. Gilbert, you can perch on the trunk. I have only three chairs in this uncomfortable place."

"We have an extra one you can take as well as not," declared Katherine, "if you care for more."

"It won't be necessary," returned Mrs. Ormond shortly. "I have a letter to read you." She looked around impressively, and then drawing Mrs. Allington's letter from her pocket, she read it aloud with due emphasis on each cordial phrase. "'P. S.,'" she added at the close, with a quick but solemn glance in the direction of her son. "'Frances desires that you will say to Mr. Ormond that here will be opportunity to give him the revenge at tennis which he asked for the last time they met.'"

"I don't remember asking anything of the sort," remarked Gilbert bluntly.

"That makes no difference since Miss Allington does," replied his mother, dropping the letter in her lap.

"Not a particle," tittered Madeline. "Frances Allington admires blond men. She told me so. There, I forgot to tell you of it until this minute. How vexed she would be with me!"

Gilbert grunted ungratefully. The memory of the tableau at the other side of the bonfire haunted him. He had been telling himself all the evening that he made a mistake, after all, to remain here. He saw what his mother was arriving at, and he lacked the energy to oppose her.

Katherine had listened indifferently. Mrs. Ormond eyed her with a vague appreciation of her fresh, happy face, as she proceeded.

"You can all see that this is not the sort of invitation one would wish to slight."

"Mrs. Allington says herself," remarked Katherine, "that the invitation is possible only because of the failure of other friends to be able to keep these dates. I should not consider it at all pressing. However, if you and Madeline wish to go, that is another matter."

"Madeline and I? Don't you want to go?" asked Mrs. Ormond.

The rush of color to Katherine's face and the trepidation in her wide eyes at this unexpected question made a startling change in her. "I?

Oh, no," she answered, her breath coming quickly as at approaching danger.

Her mother laughed in an annoyed way. "Oh, you infatuated child! Now, Gilbert, I hope you are going to oblige me?" she added, turning to him coaxingly.

"It is hardly worth while, considering the short time remaining to me; still, if you wish it, I will go."

"Thank you, dear." Mrs. Ormond smiled in her relief. "This is Wednesday. We will start Saturday morning; so absorb a great deal of your Pokonet, Katherine, in the next two days."

"But I am not going, mother," returned the girl, in distress. "Why should I go?"

"Every reason, my dear," said Mrs. Ormond decidedly. "We don't want to leave you behind us, and you see by the letter, you are needed to balance the number of young men that have been asked."

"Young men!" repeated Katherine, in involuntary scorn.

"You know very well how an odd number incommodes a hostess. Don't say another word, my dear. Mrs. Allington is a person I would not disoblige for anything. I want both my little girls under my wing."

"Oh, mother!" Katherine's face had grown pale, and she looked piteously at Gilbert, whose suspicions received confirmation then and there.

"Poor little Kitty," he thought. "This is but

the beginning of troubles." Yet he could not resist the appeal in those soft eyes, which looked as if they could never twinkle again.

"I should be very glad to stay here and look after Katherine, if you would allow that, mother. That would even up the men."

"Oh, yes!" ejaculated Katherine eagerly.

Her mother gave her an accusing look. "I have always thought you an unselfish girl, Katherine," she said severely. "The idea of accepting a suggestion which incommodes and disappoints several persons, simply because it makes it possible for you to stay with these — individuals whom you fancy so strongly."

Poor Katherine's very ears grew pink. She dared not meet the eyes of any one in the room, but sat motionless and silent until Mrs. Ormond dismissed her for the night with a kiss.

"It is too bad," said Madeline sympathetically, when they were alone, "but of course I can't understand how you can feel so about it. For my own part, I hate Pokonet. I never want to see it again."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MARY LEDDY.

"THAT four-master *is* on the bar, Ma," announced Mr. Hodgson, coming into the house the next morning from a trip of investigation to the beach.

"You don't say so," replied his wife, who was busily assisting in preparations for breakfast. She looked up with more interest than she usually manifested in her husband's communications, but her excitement was nothing to that which shone in Katherine Ormond's eyes, as, arrayed in a white wrapper, she suddenly appeared in the kitchen.

"Hel-lo, Kittiwake," said the old man, smiling at sight of his favorite. "What 's up so early in the morning?"

"I am; and is that really a schooner on the bar?"

Mr. Hodgson nodded. "Stuck as tight as wax."

"I 've been watching those masts for the last hour; and just now I saw you coming through the field, so I hurried down. I know a good stiff breeze sprang up last night, but there was no bad weather. What was the matter?"

The old man laughed. "Some pretty green steerin', I guess."

"Did the Life Saving men go out?"

"Oh, yes; they worked there a long spell. Cap'n Morse says they cal'late they saved nineteen lives, — ten men and a cat."

"Right close to us, and we knew nothing about it! I was awake awhile, and thought the sea roared louder than usual."

"Yes; there 's a middlin' big surf runnin'. Hope the wind lightens 'fore that schooner gits hammered to bits. She 's a pretty craft. They 've telegraphed to New York for the wrecker. Guess Fritz would n't be snoozin' very deep, if he knew what was on the bar. Ye might jest knock on his door as ye 're goin' past, Kittiwake;" but Katherine, with some hasty remark about being late to breakfast, whisked her white gown through the hall and up the staircase.

In an hour the whole town knew of the stranded ship. The usually quiet road became lively with pedestrians and vehicles. Everybody was eager to view the novel sight. Even Mrs. Ormond and her parasol were on the beach earlier than usual, although she protested that she could not see why people made such a fuss.

She lifted her eyeglasses to inspect the handsome new schooner, held helplessly in the grip of the sand-bar, while the waves plunged and rolled about its shining black sides.

"It is always a matter of interest and concern

when property is in danger," said Miss McKnight. "Take that prosaic view of the case."

"The ship looks safe enough," remarked Mrs. Ormond.

"Yet they tell me it is in great danger of going to pieces."

Fritz and Gilbert had made short work of breakfast, and hurried away with eager, boyish interest in what was going on; but Mrs. Ormond had insisted upon her daughters attending to certain affairs which had reference to their departure before she would permit them to follow.

"When you once get to that shore," she said firmly, "I never know when I shall be able to get hold of you again. One child in the hand is worth two on the beach; but I propose to keep you both a little while."

The consequence was, that when Katherine and Madeline arrived tardily at the scene of excitement, Marguerite and Dr. McKnight advanced toward the dunes to meet them.

"Did n't I tell you the other day that you were a siren, Miss Madeline?" asked Jasper, as he lifted his hat. "Behold the consequence over yonder. No storm, no apparent reason for the misadventure; but — we understand!"

Madeline's delicate lips curved smilingly, and she shrugged her shoulders. She could accept even Dr. McKnight's badinage, with such a prospect of congenial surroundings as the following week held out to her.

"Our brothers swam out to the schooner," announced Marguerite to Katherine.

"Have they come back?" asked the latter, looking startled. "It was too far."

She spoke so apprehensively that her friend smiled at her in a way that roused her consciousness, and slid an arm around her as they walked along together. "Gilbert has not been accustomed of late to swimming distances," continued Katherine faintly, her cheeks hot. "I always think of cramp and sharks and things, away out there. Oh, Marguerite, the pretty thing!" she continued, as they gazed at the schooner with its bare masts outlined against the vivid blue sky. "And it is such a gay, bright morning. One cannot think of disaster."

"One is averted, at all events," replied Marguerite, pointing northward, "for there come those boys now."

The attention of the quartette was immediately riveted on the two heads that appeared above the waves, and they all went to meet the swimmers, who waded ashore, smiling and breathing hard, and sank down dripping on the warm sand, receiving a volley of questions as they did so.

They described the freshness and trimness of the schooner, Fritz addressing all his remarks to Katherine.

"A ship seems so alive to me always," she answered. "I can't bear to think of its being captive and beaten by the waves that ought to

bear it along. Oh, I wish we could see it. Don't you think Captain Morse would take us out?"

"Well, there is nothing small about you," remarked Gilbert, turning to his sister. "Is all you want just to have Captain Morse run out the life-boat and the men, so you can have a near view of that schooner?"

Katherine was standing, her cheeks flushed, her eyes beaming, looking out toward the goal of her ambition.

She had forgotten the bitterness of going away, forgotten the dull blank which the rest of the summer presented, and only knew that the sun was shining, the water sparkling, the air inspiring, and that lying at her feet was the being who made any landscape beautiful for her, and whose eyes she knew were this minute fixed upon her with a look which gave her a happy sense of power.

"Yes, that is all I want," she answered demurely. Then she let her radiant look fall to meet the one that was upturned to her. "Won't you ask Captain Morse for me, Mr. Sheldon?"

Fritz rose.

"Nonsense, Katherine. You won't do anything of the kind, Sheldon," said Gilbert, highly disgusted.

"It won't do any harm to ask," answered Fritz quietly.

"Well, he 'll think you have your nerve with you."

"And so I have," said Sheldon, smiling at

Katherine, and then starting off on a run down the beach.

"Tell him I want it, too," called Madeline after him; then they all began to follow slowly. "You must remember, Gilbert, how good Captain Morse always was to us."

"That is very different. He used to put up with our being under foot, but just why that should give us the right now to meddle with his official business, I fail to see."

They soon came up to where Miss McKnight and Mrs. Ormond were sitting.

"Mr. Sheldon has gone to see if Captain Morse won't take us out to the schooner," announced Katherine.

Her mother was so glad to see her look like her happy self that she only gazed, and made no comment.

"You have confidence in Captain Morse's good nature," remarked Miss McKnight. "I should suppose the life saving crew had had too busy a night of it to care to make pleasure trips to-day."

"They were all through before two o'clock," returned Katherine, undaunted. "Mr. Sheldon was just telling us. I think the men have had as long a rest as they need. I only hope they will think so, too." She looked so merry and mischievous, as she spoke, that Miss McKnight smiled in sympathy.

"Here comes Fritz now," she answered, "so you will soon know the result of his audacity."

As the young man approached, they all looked at him expectantly.

"Well?" called Madeline. "'To be or not to be; that is the question.'"

The messenger did not answer until he had drawn near. "I did n't think the captain was going to consent at first," he began. "When I made the request, he scratched his head and smiled doubtfully, but in a minute he said that if Kitty and Maidie Ormond wanted to go out to the schooner, he guessed they 'd have to go."

"There, Gilly," exclaimed Madeline, in triumph.

"When?" asked Katherine in the same breath.

"I don't know exactly, but I think before long. He said you would have to wear your bathing-suits. You had better get them on now."

"I 'm in that?" asked Dr. McKnight eagerly.

"Certainly; our party."

The girls were already running to their bath-house, and soon the conventional maidens who had disappeared were replaced by short-skirted, black-stockinged, bare-armed figures, their heads protected by red silk handkerchiefs.

"Katherine, those waves are tremendous," said Mrs. Ormond anxiously, as the girl drew near. "Everybody has had to give up bathing."

"It 's a 'middlin' surf,' Mr. Hodgson says," she replied, her eyes twinkling narrowly.

"I have n't been consulted, but I hope it is safe."

"It does n't need to be safe, mother. What a superfluous thing safety would be with a life saving crew aboard! They 're getting out the boat," added Katherine joyously, and as the three girls started off, running, Mrs. Ormond and Miss McKnight rose and followed more slowly.

Some men in sou'westers were pushing the heavy boat down along its wooden track to the water, Fritz, Jasper, and Gilbert assisting with a will. To launch it through the powerful surf was a matter requiring skill. An audience stood about to see the party embark.

The experience was exciting at any rate to the delighted girls, who were helped over the high gunwale while the craft was still on the beach. Katherine took her place in the bow, waving her hand to her mother, who did not know exactly how to regard the novel excursion.

"Do you suppose I do right to let them go, Edna?" she asked, at intervals of a minute, and Miss McKnight continued to respond patiently: "Oh, yes, I think so."

"I suppose it 's all right, Gilbert," Mrs. Ormond called once.

"I 'm not sure. I am expecting to be very seasick," returned her son, jumping into the boat after Fritz and Jasper.

The men in their oil-skin suits stood at the brink of the water, waiting for the moment for the final shove. The oars were laid in readiness across the gunwale. A wave wet the men to the

knees; a great roller was swiftly advancing. A push to the boat, a shriek and laugh from sea and shore, Katherine was spattered with brine, the boat stood at an angle of forty-five degrees, and for a second the laughing girl looked down from her height on all creation. The last man jumped in, and down slid the boat from the wave, while every oar was dipped to guide it over the next great billow.

"I had no idea of it, Edna. Do see how they go up and down!" exclaimed Mrs. Ormond, clutching her friend's arm. "Had you any idea they would toss so? I'm sure I could n't have consented, if I had known what it would be."

"It is a great lark for them," returned Miss McKnight soothingly. "Captain Morse is very kind."

"How bright Katherine was when she was talking to him," said Mrs. Ormond, speaking distressfully. "She has the sweetest nature I ever knew. Oh, that boat seemed such an elephant on shore, and there it goes nearly out of sight between the waves. The child seemed quite unhappy last night about leaving Pokonet so soon. Some girls would have been sulky to-day; but not Katherine. Dear girl! I do so love to have my children happy, and see them enjoy themselves."

"Katherine is a rare character," returned Miss McKnight. She spoke sadly. Her heart yearned over her favorite, for she thought she saw perplexity ahead for her. She wondered if Mrs.

Ormond had some motive which did not appear in hurrying her away from Pokonet against her will. She wondered if she, too, had discovered Fritz Sheldon's attitude. "The man who wins Katherine will secure a treasure," she added tentatively.

"Yes, indeed," assented the mother, growing calmer as the boat receded and its alternations of position became less evident. "But I never think about Katherine's marrying. She has never had a love affair, I am happy to say. She is just one of those calm, capable home-bodies, who are such comforts in a house."

Meanwhile, the girl whose mother was so confident of her fancy-free condition was conscious of being divided from Fritz Sheldon by the boat's length. In its rise and fall they exchanged an occasional gay look or gesture. Fortunately, it was a set of steady heads that were undertaking the excursion, and the merry party were still merry when the schooner was reached.

"The 'Mary Leddy.' How disappointingly commonplace," said Marguerite, reading the name on the stern; but the difficulty of boarding the vessel soon swallowed up all consideration of its name. Scarcely was their painter made fast before a heavy sea struck the small craft, and the strong rope snapped like a thread. A second effort was successful, however. The boat was lifted on a wave nearly level with the schooner's deck, then slid down into the trough of the sea.

It was not an easy matter to select the right moment to step upon the rope ladder which was thrown over the schooner's side; but the transit was finally accomplished, and the party stood on the spotlessly clean deck.

The mate of the boat was on board, and received them courteously, both he and his men regarding the girls in their bathing-suits with ill-concealed astonishment.

He showed them through the neat cabin, finished in hard wood, and well carpeted and furnished.

"She 's too good to be knocked to bits," he remarked regretfully.

"You expect the wrecker by to-morrow, I believe," returned Fritz. "We 'll hope the wind will be favorable to you. All Pokonet will rejoice to see the Mary Leddy slip off the bar."

"How long will it take after the wrecker does get here?" asked Katherine.

"I suppose it depends very much on wind and weather," returned Sheldon. He looked down into her face with the brightening expression which always grew in it when he addressed her.

Katherine's did not reflect its illumination. She turned and went up on deck. A pang had gone through her at the thought of how swiftly these golden hours were slipping by, and how soon, in the fashionable conventionality of the Allington circle, time would seem to stand still.

Fritz followed her as the needle follows the

magnet, and paused beside her as she stood looking across the water to the small black figures moving on the beach.

He regarded the coquettish knot of the crimson handkerchief surmounting her dark hair, and her bare arms hanging loosely from the short, puffed sleeves.

"This is the first time I have seen you wear that dress since our adventure," he said.

"Yes," she answered, "and it is the last time I shall wear it this summer."

She looked up at him, as she spoke, with such sweet pathetic eyes and lips that he laughed from sheer love of her.

"Was it really such a fright?" he asked, and she felt blessedly conscious of the tenderness in his voice. "You must n't give up to that feeling. We will wash it away in another experience. Promise that you will go in with me to-morrow morning, — or no, not to-morrow, I have to go away with Mr. McKnight to-morrow" —

"Must you?" interrupted Katherine involuntarily; then flushed red as her handkerchief.

The exclamation turned Sheldon's face radiant. He knew that she liked him, but could it be that she cared for him as he cared for her; that one day's absence was a thing for her to dread as he dreaded it?

"Yes, I must, I 'm sorry to say," he answered, as composedly as he could, being aware of the fact that a sailor was lingering near and watching

them furtively. "It is a business errand to examine a piece of machinery. Mr. McKnight engaged that we would go to see it to-morrow, and unfortunately I 'm the Hamlet of the affair, and the trip can't be made without me. Was it anything especial that you wanted to do?" In spite of himself, he could not keep all his happiness out of his voice.

Katherine, since her involuntary exclamation, had held her face averted.

"Oh, no," she answered as carelessly as she was able. "I only felt selfishly like keeping our whole party together the one more day that is left to me. We go away on Saturday."

Sheldon looked aghast. "Go away. Where to?" His changed tone was so expressive that Katherine glanced up at him again.

"To — I believe it is to Bar Harbor. At any rate, it is to visit the Allingtons."

"But why need you go?"

Katherine's lip curled. "I believe in order that Mrs. Allington's guests, girls and men, should be equally balanced. I did n't know until last night. My mother" —

"She is taking you away," ejaculated Fritz. His companion had never before seen him moved from his steady balance. "Then to-day and to-morrow" —

"Beg pardon, sir," interrupted the sailor, despairing of waiting for this couple to move. "That coil of rope in front of you, sir." He

dove for it as the young people stepped back, and at the same moment Dr. McKnight hailed them. The sea was in a tumult; the men could not hold the boat any longer; they must go at once.

"Sliding down a cellar door is nothing to this," said Jasper to Fritz as the small craft rose slowly, and then plunged to the depths. How and when to drop into it from the rope ladder was a problem for novices.

One by one the party descended, and at Captain Morse's word of command let go their hold on the rope.

Fritz and Katherine came last. He preceded her, and stood below to help her at the difficult last moment. She was half way down the pliable ladder when she paused. One foot swung off, and her body seemed to sway. Fritz, watching her every movement, jumped and seized the rope, and was beside her with incredible swiftness. Balancing himself with one foot below her, he seized the side of the ladder and threw the other arm around her body.

"Are you dizzy? You frightened me!" he ejaculated, looking straight into her eyes. His mustache swept her cheek. She had been pale with sudden terror of the boiling, leaping waves that seemed hungering to reach and swallow her, and now she turned whiter still.

"My darling," he breathed, pressing her to him. The wild, dizzying confusion below became as nothing to Katherine. Here, clinging to her

lover and he to her, was where she would fain have remained. They were together. Mr. Robert McKnight with his odious business schemes could not rob her of him. Her mother could not rob him of her. Ah, if it could only last! The party below were waiting impatiently.

"Now, dearest, we go," said Fritz. Up rose the life-boat from an abyss. Lifting Katherine quite away from the ladder as he stepped down, he was ready for it, and deposited her safely on the unstable foothold, following himself.

Madeline, sitting next her sister in the boat, surveyed her curiously. Katherine did not look like a person who had been in need of special assistance. Indeed, her appearance was such as might be expected in one who had just swallowed the elixir of eternal life and youth. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes full of new beauty.

"Were you really dizzy?" asked Madeline.

Her sister looked at her absently, and smiled.

"Well, why don't you answer?" asked the other impatiently.

"Did you speak to me?"

"Yes. I asked you if you were dizzy up there. Goodness, how this thing pitches!"

"No, I 'm not dizzy," replied Katherine.

Her gentle, beatific voice and look, in connection with the tableau on the rope ladder, impressed even Madeline, who, having no affair of her own on hand just then, had more leisure than usual to think of her sister. Illumined by her new idea,

she looked past the others at Fritz. He was engrossed in helping the men.

Captain Morse was standing in a picturesque attitude at the stern, using his oar to guide the boat. The waves had so increased in size that she often had to be headed around into them, to avoid swamping.

An interested crowd on shore were watching their progress, Mrs. Ormond and Miss McKnight being among the number. The latter's brother had come down to the beach to inquire Fritz's whereabouts.

When told that he was on the stranded schooner, the old gentleman's manner evinced some impatience.

"I didn't know Mr. Sheldon ever played truant," remarked Mrs. Ormond, twirling her parasol handle on her shoulder.

"No, that isn't much in his line," returned Mr. McKnight dryly, looking seaward from under his white eyebrows. "Don't I see a boat now?"

"You may, Robert," returned his sister. "All I can say is, you have good eyes."

"He is right. They have started," said Mrs. Ormond. "Dear me, what waves! I wish Captain Morse had not been so good natured."

It was exciting to watch the homeward passage of the boat that held such a precious load and looked so small between the white-crested billows. As it was headed at last toward the beach, the girls waved their hands gayly to their friends.

"How will they ever land through that surf?" exclaimed Mrs. Ormond.

She was soon to see. Everybody stood up and came as near to the hissing, swift-creeping foam as they dared, while the life-boat was borne aloft on a great wave rolling and roaring shoreward. The men in oil-skins and bathing-suits jumped overboard and seized the gunwale as she shot upon the sand, and the next billow caught and splashed the girls amid a general shout of laughter.

Captain Morse was profusely thanked for his obligingness, and a chorus of questions and answers arose.

Mr. McKnight waited with what patience he might while Sheldon lent his strength to the returning of the boat to its place. It filled Katherine with apprehension to see the old gentleman here. He was a rare visitor to the beach, preferring to take his recreation in fishing or sailing expeditions with Mr. Hodgson. She resented now the way he kept his eyes fixed on Fritz, waiting for an opportunity to get his attention, and her ears were sharpened to hear his first words, as the blue and white bathing-suit of his factotum drew near.

"Those papers came by the morning mail, Sheldon," he said, in tones of satisfaction. "Now we can fix up the whole business."

Fritz assented with a calm exterior, stopped and talked a minute, then moved to where Katherine was standing removing the wet red handkerchief from her hair.

"Some papers have come that make it necessary for me to work all the afternoon," he said, looking at her with an expression which assured her that for once his heart was not in the subject of steam pipes.

She said nothing, but she was thinking, "To-day and to-morrow; it is too cruel."

"It is business which Mr. McKnight has been particularly anxious to have accomplished before to-morrow's trip. It is connected with it."

Katherine lifted her eyes and pushed back her pretty, tumbled hair. "I hate Mr. McKnight," she said gently and deliberately.

Fritz flushed all over. "I must set my teeth and go through with it, Katherine. *Katherine*," he repeated, drawing out the syllables like a caress.

"Coming, Sheldon?" called his employer. Presumably he had once stood where Fritz stood now, but his tone betokened that he had forgotten all about it.

"Yes, at once," called the young man; then in a totally different voice he added low: "We can't afford to hate him, dear." He held out his hand, and Katherine put hers into its strong clasp. "It is 'we,' now, isn't it?" he asked, recklessly holding her hand in the radiant noonday sunshine, though the world seemed very full of superfluous fellow-beings, who kept passing inconveniently near.

Katherine answered him with a smile, and a

glance that he thought perfect, though it was so tangled in her silky lashes.

"Then *auf wiedersehen*, my own love," he continued, with parting intensity, "and pray that I may forget you for the next few hours" —

"Katherine, come, we are going." It was Mrs. Ormond's voice in imperious accents.

One last pressure of the hands, and Fritz set off running toward the bath-house, while Katherine turned to meet her mother, who was advancing with some nervousness in her haste. The girl was slightly the taller, and beamed down upon the incensed face, lovely in the afterglow of happiness.

"Really, I am annoyed with you, Katherine," said Mrs. Ormond severely. "Unconventionality and eccentricity are carried a little too far when they hold my daughter's hand like that in broad, open daylight. If he does n't know any better, you do. What were you thinking of?"

As if Katherine could ever tell anybody what she was thinking of.

"I presume you would rather he did it in public than in private," flippantly remarked Madeline, who had heard this reprimand.

"Go and get dressed, both of you," said Mrs. Ormond. "It is nearly dinner time."

When the girls were in their bath-house, Madeline broke the silence that had fallen between them. "I 've found you out, Katherine. I know now why you don't want to leave Pokonet."

Madeline had meant to continue her flippancy, and to be very off-hand; but the gentle, unconsciously exalted look which her sister turned toward her was moving, even to the selfish little autocrat.

With a sudden dash at Katherine, she kissed her.

"You don't deserve that," she said, "for you have been disgracefully close-mouthed, considering that I always tell you everything. I was never so surprised in my life, I 'll confess that, flat; and mother will be wild. If you take my advice, you 'll elope."

"Oh, don't, Madeline," said Katherine. She was glad to have the kiss, but she wished her sister would have stopped there.

"I don't feel that way," ran on the younger. "I want you to understand that. I believe he 's a rising man; but I tell you, mother's prejudice is a mountain. You would n't care anything about a showy, expensive wedding, and think of the money an elopement saves. It would be so romantic, too. I 'd love to have one in the family, but I could never consent to elope, myself. When I am a bride, I want to have a crowd of people waiting and stretching their necks for the first glimpse of me. I suppose you don't want me to say anything to mother?"

"No," returned Katherine. "Oh no, not yet. I 'm hardly sure of it, myself — yet."

"I am, then," retorted Madeline irrepressibly.

"You 've no idea what a theatrical scene it was when old Poke — excuse me, Katherine, I thought he was a Poke until then — vaulted up that ladder and caught you in his arms. I was electrified. But it was an awful give-away. Come, don't look haughty." She laughed, and caught her sister in her arms. "We 're different, but I 'm truly glad if you 're happy, dear."

Katherine returned the caress, and smiled at the speaker from the heights where her soul stood. "Then be glad," she answered.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EVE OF DEPARTURE.

KATHERINE, sustaining the fire of her mother's and sister's comments, missed one little episode that occurred after Fritz left her. His way lay past his sister, and he paused in his hurry to seize both her hands and look his joy for one swift moment into her eyes before hastening on.

The events of the morning, and now this triumphant ebullition from grave, matter-of-fact Fritz, left no doubt in her mind as to how matters stood.

His excitement communicated itself to Marguerite in such degree that her limbs felt weak. She sat down in the lee of a neighboring sand dune to realize how glad she was for him; and as fast as her eyes became misty she drew her hand impatiently across them, and told herself that it was always foolish to cry for joy. Had she not been willing at one time to leave him in loneliness for his own good? Was this not a thousand times better?

She would have a pleasant room somewhere, and go on making hats and bonnets in serene independence. What was this? She suddenly

loathed the thought of millinery, and a dark face with a smile flashing from it like sunshine seemed to regard her. She put it away. It was the face of the tempter. She was nervous already from long consideration of it in imagination and in the flesh.

The effect of a long vacation is enervating, she decided.

She thought wistfully of Katherine. How happy she must be to know her own mind; to have no hesitations, or doubts. Again the dark, expressive face, with the brilliant eyes so like the Wise Woman's, rose before her. Happy Katherine. Yet there was Mrs. Ormond. Fritz would have to become aware of her now. Marguerite wondered if he would ever call that ambitious personage "mother." The thought struck her as amusing, and she began to laugh. This set free the threatening tears, and there in the protection of the sand dune she became overcome by a mild attack of hysterics, after which, Katherine and Madeline being safely out of the way, she went to the bath-house and made her toilet, reaching home after the family had sat down to dinner. Fritz was not present. Mr. McKnight had already claimed him.

"What 's the reason ye ain't eatin', Kitty," Mr. Hodgson was saying, as Marguerite entered the dining-room. "Have n't ye got a good piece, or are ye in love?" He grinned at poor Katherine.

"Thank you — I have everything — very nice," returned the girl, busily attacking her plate, and glancing away from Marguerite's eyes.

Madeline choked on the water she was drinking at the moment of her sister's ambiguous reply, and Mrs. Ormond smiled. Katherine seemed so alone among them, and she loved Fritz. Marguerite's heart went out to her with new, sudden strength, and claimed her.

"Yes, Mr. Hodgson," said Mrs. Ormond. "Katherine is in love, and I am about separating her from the beloved object."

Katherine's heart bounded. What did her mother know? What was she going to say publicly? The girl, in spite of her burning color, lifted her head slowly with unconscious pride, and fixed her eyes on the speaker.

"She fell in love with Pokonet at a very early age, and she does n't get over it at all," went on Mrs. Ormond. "I am going to take her away Saturday, and she is behaving as well as she can about it, but I know it is a pull."

"Yes, so Ma 's been tellin' me," said Mr. Hodgson dejectedly. "I 'm glad Kittiwake don't want to leave us. We always begrudge to see the last of her."

Katherine could not trust herself to send the old man a look. She controlled herself only by an effort, and Marguerite saw it all. It was news to her that the Ormonds were going, but out of regard to Katherine, she made no comment now.

She hardly knew how to treat her friend. She did not want to take too much for granted in the present unacknowledged state of affairs; neither did she wish to be tardy in welcoming Katherine as a sister.

Katherine herself settled her perplexities for the afternoon by disappearing. No one knew where she was. Her mother inquired for her several times with considerable impatience. Madeline for once stood her sister's defender. "Do let her say good-by to Pokonet in her own way," she said. "You don't need her. To-morrow will be plenty of time to see to the packing."

"But she might have said where she was going," complained Mrs. Ormond. "Do you suppose she may have gone sailing with Fritz Sheldon?"

"No, he is working with Mr. McKnight. The Wise Woman just said so. She is down on the piazza with Marguerite."

"Well, she might have said where she was going," repeated Mrs. Ormond.

Katherine came home in time for tea, and made a careful toilet; but the one she longed for did not appear.

"Poor Fritz, this is hard on him," said Marguerite, as she approached her friend on the piazza after supper. Katherine nestled close to her, but said nothing. Marguerite put an arm around her.

"The Wise Woman has been here this afternoon. Are you jealous?"

Katherine shook her head, and the other laughed at her novel quiescence, and gave her a loving squeeze.

"We never mentioned you. Now, how do you feel?"

Katherine smiled.

"Oh, yes, we did. The Wise Woman asked where you were. I replied that I did n't know. She said something very nice, I guess I sha'n't tell you what, about regret at your going away from Pokonet. I agreed and — that 's all. Indeed, Katherine, I was shocked to hear of your leaving. What shall I do with Fritz?" asked Marguerite tentatively.

The strangest little half-sigh, half-sob, broke from Katherine.

"Be very good to him," she answered.

Of course, after that there was no need for hesitation.

"I am very happy about it," said Marguerite. "You are the one girl in all the world I should prefer to have for a sister."

The charm she had always exerted over Katherine was as strong as ever. The latter looked up with eyes full of feeling, and the two kissed each other.

It was a charming, dreamy evening. The moon was at the half, the ailanthus branches stirred, the sea broke on the sands with a gentleness which augured favorably for the success of the wrecker already working to liberate the schooner; but

Fritz remained away. Katherine would not have known that he came home at all that night, except for two things. One was a noise of wheels very early the next morning, which waked her from her light slumbers. Leaping from the bed, she reached the window in time to see Fritz and Mr. Hodgson driving away to the depot. Apparently Fritz thought she might be looking, for he took off his hat and waved it toward the house. She, kneeling behind the slats of the closed blinds, watched him out of sight; then the smile faded from her face, and she was stealing back to bed forlornly, when her eye caught something white beneath the door.

Her glance brightened, and she stooped to pick up a letter. She opened it cautiously, not to wake Madeline. It was from him, and it flushed her as the sunlight reddens a rose.

There was but one portion of it that would bear publication, and that was where the writer declared that he should make every effort to spend that evening with her, although it might after all prove impossible.

She surprised those most interested by her gayety at the breakfast-table, and her spirits were sustained at a cheerful pitch during the packing of her trunk; but when that undertaking was accomplished, when nothing remained for her to do, the unreasonableness, the aggravation of the situation returned upon her, and grew in force.

The day was dull and overcast. Marguerite was

busy assisting her aunt; Mrs. Ormond and Madeline were full of pleasurable speculations concerning the coming visit. Katherine had read her letter until she could recite it backward. She suddenly determined to go to see the Wise Woman. Why had she not thought of it sooner! Perhaps that clever friend might yet preserve her from her distasteful fate. A glow warmed the girl as she thought of a possible reprieve; of freedom to stay on here where the sunny days and the breezy nights under the waxing moon would now be doubly sweet.

"It has begun to rain," objected Mrs. Ormond, when her daughter announced her intention.

"I 'm afraid you have forgotten your fairy tales, mother," Katherine replied. "Did the puzzled princess ever allow a little rain to stand in the way of her going to consult the Wise Woman?"

She buttoned her mackintosh, and Mrs. Ormond made no further objection. There was an undercurrent of feeling in her mind that the girl was bearing up well under a disappointment. It was unfortunate that this last day should be rainy. Let the child enjoy it, if she could.

Katherine arrived at her destination rosy from the brief struggle with the wind. Miss McKnight received her cordially.

"This will give us a heavy sea, won't it?" she asked. "It is fortunate the schooner got off."

"Is she off?" asked Katherine, with interest. Wherever the Mary Leddy might sail, no breeze

could ever bear her out of the affectionate memory of one woman.

"Yes, Jasper saw the last of her early this morning, after helping his uncle to get away. This is a great time for departures. My brother's is only a short trip, but I hear you desert Pokonet for the season, to-morrow. How is it that you did n't tell me?"

"It came upon me so suddenly," — Katherine seated herself close to her friend, — "and since then I have been in a sort of dream. I only waked up half an hour ago, when my trunk was actually packed, and then I was panic-stricken, and I flew to you, as usual."

Miss McKnight regarded her in silence, her kindly gaze seeming to sink into the soul that was reaching out to her.

"Think, dear Wise Woman, what is before me. Do you know what it is that I am going to?"

"Yes your mother read me Mrs. Allington's letter."

"There is n't any help for me, unless you help me," said Katherine beseechingly. "You have so much influence with mother, I thought, possibly, if you came over and talked to her, and promised to take care of me" — She paused, and her appealing eyes said the rest.

Miss McKnight smiled slightly. "I am afraid it is impossible, my little Katherine," she returned gently. "I have thought of it, myself, and wished I could do it, but I don't see my way.

This is not a time when I can step in between you and your mother."

The girl blushed. "Why? Do you — don't you" — She stammered and stopped.

The elder woman shook her white head, still with the kind smile. "I suspect that just now you are a great responsibility."

Katherine was silent a moment, then she came still closer to her friend's chair. "But you like — Fritz," she said softly.

"And your mother does n't," added Miss McKnight quietly.

The girl bit her lip. She had been too engrossed with her own feelings ever to look this fact full in the face.

Her friend continued: "Perhaps it is as well for you to go away now, before anything happens, and wait" —

Katherine caught Miss McKnight's hand between both her own, interrupting her with a sort of eager embarrassment. "But several very nice things have happened," she said naïvely. "It is too late to help anything. You might as well keep me."

"Does your mother know?"

"No."

"Katherine!"

"But I told you I have been in a dream. Beside, how can I tell her?"

"It will be hard. You will have need of great patience."

"How much patience ought I to have? How can I listen to one word against him?"

"You will have to make up your mind to bear that, and to wait."

Katherine looked up at her friend with eyes in which happiness struggled with perplexity.

"What a beautiful thing youth is," thought Miss McKnight, watching the changes that flitted over the sensitive face. "Oh, there 's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream."

"He is a man worth waiting for, Katherine," she said aloud.

"Then I have pleased you, at all events," returned the girl.

"Yes, and so has he. I scarcely dare tell either of you how much."

The first suggestion of tears Katherine had ever seen in Miss McKnight's eyes veiled their brightness as she spoke.

"Think what you will be to me now," said the girl impulsively. "I shall come to you and beg you to talk about him when mother" —

"Wait, dear. I am so sorry for your mother."

"So am I; but what reason has she" —

"Yes, yes; but she has given her whole life to her children, as every loving mother does, and now you are going to disappoint her. Try to keep her standpoint in mind continually, when the matter comes to discussion."

"Then you would n't advise me to — to do anything without her consent?"

"No, indeed. You owe her everything. You can't help loving Fritz, but you can comfort her heart by letting her know that you love her even while she is hurting your feelings, as perhaps she will. Prepare yourself beforehand to be very patient. There is a wise and useful old proverb, I think it is Persian: 'Of the unspoken word you are master. The spoken word is master of you.' It will be a good saying for you to keep in mind."

"Then I must be resigned to going to the Allingtons'," said Katherine, with a rueful little smile, "and to letting Mr. McKnight carry Fritz off at the very moment when — when — and he has had to stay away all these two last days!" she finished incoherently.

Miss McKnight laughed; but she caressed the girl with unusual warmth.

"I congratulate you, Katherine, in spite of all the discipline, present and to come. I would rather see you married to Fritz Sheldon than to any man I know."

Altogether, Katherine's visit to the Wise Woman was satisfactory, although she had failed in her object. She came away feeling braced and encouraged, and greeted her mother, when she returned, with a more cheerful face than that with which she had left her.

"The wind almost takes one's breath away," she announced brightly.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Ormond. "Mr. Hodgson says they are likely now to have a 'spell o'

weather.' How lucky we are, to be leaving in the nick of time."

"Lucky to be going to miss a big storm?" returned Katherine wistfully, as she pulled off her Tam o' Shanter.

"How is Miss McKnight enduring the day?"

"She seems happy. Obdurate, though."

"What about?"

"I 'm afraid you would think me a hardened sinner, if I told you."

Mrs. Ormond looked into the bright face fondly. "You are the best child I know of," she said.

"Even if I don't want to leave Pokonet?"

"But you behave so well about it, my dear," returned the mother, deprecating by her tone a reference to anything unpleasant.

"I have been trying to get the Wise Woman to persuade you to let her keep me."

Mrs. Ormond looked gently reproachful. "You show an obstinacy in this matter, Katherine, that exhibits you in a new phase."

"Oh, I am obstinate, mother," returned the girl, a certain excitement appearing through her cheerfulness, as the thought of her heart's happiness sent a flash through her. "However, the Wise Woman would n't hear to me."

"Edna has far too good taste to interfere like that," said Mrs. Ormond, picking up the book she had laid down at her daughter's entrance.

"She said she would not have the responsibility

of me," pursued Katherine. Her pulses hurried. She wished her mother would question her. She longed to tell her the truth.

But Mrs. Ormond was already reabsorbed in her story. Since Katherine had given up an annoying project, and was doing so cheerfully, she asked no more of her.

However, Mrs. Ormond's equanimity was not to remain serene. Fritz, not without some difficulty in overriding objections to his haste, succeeded in returning to Pokonet that evening in a wild storm of wind and rain.

The family, their numbers not as usual augmented by the McKnights, were sitting about the living-room in unusual quiet, all but Katherine occupied with reading or fancy work. She held a magazine, but her attention wandered, and her hearing was sharpened to take note of every sound. A hundred times some freak of the wind as it whipped the storm-beaten branches or worried a window blind misled her, and made her heart leap; but at last it came, — the unmistakable rush of wheels approaching through the rain, nearer, nearer to the farmhouse.

Her flushed face, half-eager, half-shy, glanced up at Marguerite. The latter had heard too, and risen quickly. Meeting Katherine's telltale look, she recollected herself and sank back into her chair. It was no longer her right to be first to meet her brother.

Katherine endured a moment of painful hesita-

tion, then she arose. She shrank from going to meet Fritz, but she shrank still more from welcoming him here in the family circle. The intensity of the letter she still carried warned her.

She slipped out of the room, closing the door behind her, and when Sheldon entered the house, he saw her standing there, smiling, blushing, shy, in the dim little hall. With a joyful exclamation he stepped forward.

The wind Katherine loved shook the old door and rattled its latch boisterously, as she yielded to her lover's strong embrace, and their lips met.

In the sitting-room, Mr. Hodgson looked up from his paper. "I guess it was Fritz come in," he remarked, beginning to rise.

Marguerite smilingly pulled him back into his chair.

"Don't leave me, uncle Silas," she said.

"Hey?" he returned, looking over his spectacles.

"I say don't leave me."

"But I said that was Fritz come in a minute ago."

"Well, I dare say the boy is drenched. Let him go and get dry the first thing."

As she finished speaking, the object of her remarks entered the room. The whole place seemed vivified by his presence. Katherine did not reappear. She had stolen upstairs upon being apprised of Sheldon's immediate intention.

"Good evening, everybody," he said, in hearty

tones, and the company responded in their various fashions. Madeline, who had been alive to the silent interview in the hall, regarded him with critical, yet approving eyes. His was, especially just now, the sort of face a woman likes to look upon.

Mrs. Ormond regarded his greeting as a rather noisy interruption, and returned to her novel as hastily as might be. She had just reached its climax.

"Set down, sir," said Mr. Hodgson, pushing up his spectacles and crossing his legs. "Give an account o' yourself. Tell us all about it."

"I will, later, although it will make a prosy story. First, I must disturb Mrs. Ormond. Mrs. Ormond, will you give me ten minutes?"

The lady looked up from her book. She was loth to leave it, and her face plainly indicated the fact.

"Did you speak to me, Mr. Sheldon?" she asked, holding her novel with the evident desire to return to it immediately.

"Yes. You go quite early in the morning, I believe. I have something important to say to you, else I would n't disturb you now."

Madeline admired his self-possession, the simplicity which was always a part of his unostentatious strength.

Mrs. Ormond stared at him in genuine surprise, and let her book slowly close on her finger. "You —you don't want to see me alone, do you?"

"Yes, if you please." The situation was certainly growing awkward for Fritz, Madeline considered; but it was likely to become more so before it was less. She wished intensely that she might be an invisible listener to the conversation about to ensue in the parlor, whither Fritz conducted his astonished companion.

He lighted the large lamp on the centre-table, and they sat down upon two haircloth chairs.

"Ugh! it is cold in here," observed Mrs. Ormond, shuddering obviously.

To her increased surprise Fritz arose, went into the hall, and returned with a shawl, which he placed about her shoulders. He was not going to allow the interview to be postponed on account of the weather.

To take serious cognizance of Mrs. Ormond, to consider her attitude toward him, was a duty which had come to him along with his happiness, and he had given his mind to it at leisure intervals since yesterday.

Closing the door again, he took the chair facing her. "I have not been fortunate enough as yet to win your friendship, Mrs. Ormond," he began, without circumlocution. "Is n't that so?"

The astonished woman recoiled from his bluntness.

"Why, Mr. Sheldon, you surprise me. Have I been guilty of treating you in a manner" —

"Yes, that is it," he interrupted, impatient of evasions, yet smiling at her. "You have treated

me in a manner. Now, under most circumstances, I should n't annoy you about this. You have no reason to like me that I know of; but the exceptional circumstance has come about, under which it matters vitally to me whether or no you look upon me favorably."

"Heavens! Madeline!" thought Mrs. Ormond, forgetting her novel.

"Have you any special fault to find with me? Is there anything in my life or habits that you can specify as disagreeable to you?" he went on, looking seriously into his companion's face.

She began to find the situation flattering. Fritz was by no means the kind of man whose earnestness can be lightly met. She had long been forced reluctantly to respect him, and now he was appealing to her mercy.

"No, I cannot say that there is," she returned with condescension. "I have not intended to convey any criticism of you by my actions. What right have I?"

"Every right," responded Fritz promptly. "I love your daughter."

Mrs. Ormond swelled with a comfortable sense of importance. Poor fellow, he certainly had a fine face. What it was to be the mother of a belle! Yet even now a wistful pang assailed her. If only it were Jasper sitting there and looking at her with such penetrating eyes.

She did not speak at once, and Sheldon was surprised that she did not seem startled by his

blunt declaration. On the contrary, her expression was almost gracious.

She slightly bowed her head with dignity. She had been through a similar scene before, and she replied to him now with a virtuous phrase which had served her well on the previous occasion.

"I cannot coerce my children in these matters, Mr. Sheldon."

Relief lighted up Fritz's strong features. "Then you are willing to accept me as a son-in-law?" he asked.

She regarded him kindly in her absolute certainty. "I think there will be no question of that," she answered.

"Thank you, Mrs. Ormond!" He would have seized her hand in his gratitude.

"You misunderstand me," she returned hastily. "I mean that my daughter will not answer you as you hope."

"But she has done so."

Mrs. Ormond stammered in her bewilderment. "Has done so — wishes to marry you — Madeline!"

"Pardon me," said Fritz, gravely smiling. "I had forgotten for the moment that you had two daughters. My mind holds but one idea — Katherine."

"Katherine!" Mrs. Ormond repeated the name in startled accents, and rose to her feet, pressing her hand to her heart. She had received a genuine shock. This was no longer a comedy.

Rapidly her mind reviewed a hundred proofs that what this young man stated was true. How lamentably blind and careless she had been! But Katherine would be amenable. She always was. Just as she had given up Pokonet, so would she give up this ineligible suitor at her mother's bidding.

"It is my duty," she began aloud, although her breath came short, "not to allow you to be misled by false hopes."

"Thank you; but they are not false."

"They are, Mr. Sheldon. It is my duty to say so at once."

The expression of her crimson face showed Fritz that her attitude was precisely what he had at first feared it would be.

"A moment ago," he answered, "you declared that you would not coerce your child."

"Katherine is very inexperienced."

"I would not have her experienced in these matters," said Sheldon, rising also, and looking down upon his companion, who was trembling with excitement. "We love each other, Mrs. Ormond," he continued calmly. "I would rather marry her with your consent than without it, but life is before us, and we belong to each other."

The lady looked up, dumb with amazement at this audacity. His eyes even more than his words assured her that she had two to reckon with in this problem. There was nothing "amenable" in the expression of Sheldon's respectful face.

"I assure you," she replied, when she could command herself, "that Katherine belongs to me as yet, and you will discover it. I will bid you good night, Mr. Sheldon."

The dignified bearing with which she swept from the room lasted until she entered Katherine's chamber above-stairs.

The girl rose at her entrance, and quailed before her imposing, silent gaze. Only an instant, then she ran to the angry woman and threw her arms around her neck.

"Mother, let us be kind to each other through it all," she said breathlessly.

"Katherine, how could you!" asked Mrs. Ormond, with deep reproach.

"I don't know," responded the girl, close in her mother's neck. "I did n't mean to. I just loved him without knowing what was happening."

"You must have known that it meant choosing between your mother and that struggling, unknown young man whom I could never accept."

"I knew you would say hard things, dear, so go right on, and get them all said; while I have my arms around you, it won't hurt so much."

Mrs. Ormond made futile attempts to move her daughter back where she could see her. It certainly detracted from the dignity and force of her remarks to be obliged to say them over the shoulder of the culprit, and the smooth cheek of the latter against her own was disturbing to her train of thought.

"I refuse to regard it too seriously, Katherine, for you are a good, dutiful child, and in the end have never in your life refused to give up what I asked you to for my sake."

"I must this time, though, dear, because it is n't I alone any more. It is Fritz, too. I shall do just as you say, of course, but I have to feel all this that has poured into me of late, and it will burn me up if you shut it in, mother; it will burn me up!" The low, excited speech finished in a sob, and Katherine's frame was so racked with weeping that her mother put aside all thought of argument in endeavors to soothe her. She would make herself ill, and possibly be unable to travel in the morning. The thought was most disquieting.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RECEPTION.

THE autumn had come. Summer was a memory. Its high light to Mrs. Ormond and Madeline had been the visit to the Allingtons. The mother's pride had been delightfully flattered by the success her pretty daughter had made. Nevertheless, she told herself that she was never to enjoy undisturbed pleasure in this world. Katherine was a source either of annoyance or anxiety all the time they were at Bar Harbor. Mrs. Ormond could not deny that she behaved well. True, only her body was the Allingtons' guest, her heart was ever straying, but it was a meek and obliging little body that sailed, and played tennis, and danced, whenever it was asked.

It was intolerable to have a letter coming to the girl in the same masculine handwriting every day. Mrs. Ormond was in constant dread lest their hostess should discover the identity of the writer; yet something restrained her from forbidding the frequency of those letters. The radiance had gone out of Katherine's face. It was patent to her family that she was enduring and waiting.

"She begins to look like a plant in a cellar,"

said Gilbert bluntly to his mother, on the morning when he was obliged to bid the Allingtons good-by.

"Yes, it is rather too cold and bracing here for her after the Long Island coast," returned Mrs. Ormond. She had discovered before this that Gilbert was actively, and Madeline passively, opposed to her attitude regarding Fritz Sheldon, so the subject had been tacitly avoided among them.

Gilbert ignored her reply. "Katherine has plenty of common sense," he said. "If you gave her your sympathy, and she was not made to feel that she stood alone in the matter nearest her heart, she would endure the separation all right, no doubt. As it is, you probably see that she doesn't eat anything. We must take her as we find her. Pretty good sort, too, only it is the kind capable of pining to death. You want to remember that, mother, for the present and future."

So it will be seen that there were thorns in Mrs. Ormond's garden of roses, and when the glamorous summer life was over, and the return to Montaigne was made, the thorns did not lessen, for she was confronted by a glad and determined lover, who came with Gilbert to meet them at the train in New York, and greeted herself and seized upon Katherine with an air of assurance and proprietorship for which she had not been prepared.

"He is a most indelicate person," she declared to Gilbert. "Does he suppose he is coming to

our house right along, as if it were a settled thing?"

"Oh, you can forbid him the house, if you like," said Gilbert indifferently. "It will be rather inconvenient and embarrassing for Katherine to meet him elsewhere, though."

Mrs. Ormond gasped.

"You can't help it; I can't help it," went on Gilbert. "He owns her. Look at her now."

Soon afterward, Gilbert called upon Miss McKnight.

"I think you will have to be charitable and help mother out," he remarked. "Sheldon comes to the house constantly, and mother has n't yet either taken him to task, or welcomed him. She is on the fence, in a very uncertain and not too dignified position. I should be sorry to have her tumble off. If you would kindly help her to get down on the right side, we should all be infinitely obliged to you."

Acting upon this hint, Miss McKnight in a few days went to call on the Ormonds. She had already had plenty of occasions to observe Katherine, with an appreciation of the girl's situation. Her lover was unwelcome in her mother's home, her enjoyment of him thwarted and repressed in a hundred ways. No wonder that when he was not by, her eyes were serious and her smile rare.

To-day, when Miss McKnight called, Katherine was away. That was as she had hoped; and after she had listened to a glowing description from

Madeline and Mrs. Ormond of the joys of their visit at the Allingtons', she took her cue.

"Mrs. Allington gives you a good character, also," she remarked. "She was speaking to me about you yesterday; and she asked me a leading question. She asked if Katherine were engaged to Fritz Sheldon."

"I hope you said no," returned Mrs. Ormond energetically.

"Oh, mother, what's the use, with the Wise Woman?" suggested Madeline lazily.

"I won't deny that I am being tried beyond endurance, Edna!" ejaculated Mrs. Ormond, with nervous irritation.

"I saw how matters were going, at Pokonet," said Miss McKnight. "You know my estimate of Fritz, so you will not be surprised to hear that I regard the affair more hopefully than you do."

"I tell mother he is a rising man," put in Madeline.

"And a very prepossessing one to most people," remarked Miss McKnight.

"People without daughters," suggested Mrs. Ormond bitterly.

"Oh yes, and with. If this affair of Katherine's could have been postponed a year, there would be a dozen mothers in Montaigne eager to take him off your hands. I need n't even postpone it so long. There are plenty now. I personally feel very happy that Katherine has chosen him."

"I suppose you told Mrs. Allington so," said Mrs. Ormond sarcastically.

"No, I did n't. I told her that the engagement had not been announced to me, and that as I was an intimate friend of the family, I did not doubt I should be among the first to hear of it."

"That was very discreet of you, I am sure," returned Mrs. Ormond. Her dear Edna had not given perfect satisfaction the past summer, still she could not announce herself as the intimate friend of the family too often to please Mrs. Ormond.

"Mrs. Allington went on to say very pleasant things about Fritz" —

"Did she really?"

"Certainly. One never hears anything else from anybody but you." Miss McKnight smiled encouragingly, and Mrs. Ormond felt doubtful. Was she fighting a shadow? She could not find any serious fault with Fritz. If she could only be sure that the best people were going to continue to countenance and encourage him.

"What I came for to-day, really, was to talk to you about this matter," said Miss McKnight frankly. "I know I am taking a liberty, but my regard for you all, and my vital interest in everything that touches Katherine, impelled me."

"We are glad you did come," said Madeline, flinging her mother a glance. "What we need is a fresh idea."

"Yes, say whatever you like, Edna," added Mrs. Ormond dispiritedly.

"I suppose you have no expectation of turning Katherine from this allegiance."

"If I had any support, I should have considerable hope of it; but I have no support."

Madeline lifted her eyebrows at her mother's words. It was not the first time she had been reproached for going over to the enemy, but Katherine's attitude and situation had touched her into real sympathy. Moreover, the shrewd girl, less narrow than her mother, suspected that Fritz Sheldon would be a credit to them in time to come.

"Then," said Miss McKnight, "my advice to you is not to allow the fact of the engagement to leak out. That method is always undignified, and in this case I suppose you would be loth to allow people to suppose that you were not pleased with Katherine's choice."

Mrs. Ormond bit her lip, and faced her friend with troubled eyes.

"The thing to do," continued the visitor, "is to give a reception for the express purpose of announcing the engagement."

Mrs. Ormond writhed in her chair.

"I should be delighted to do it myself," said Miss McKnight, "but it would be better to have it right here, and I should hope that you would invite me to help you receive. Marguerite, too."

"You mean to go on being as helpful to those young people as ever?" said Mrs. Ormond. "I thought last season they were only a fad with you."

Miss McKnight knew that this was no lightly-put question.

"I could not consent to forego their friendship, I assure you," she answered; then, determined for Katherine's sake to bring every persuasion to bear, she decided, against her own taste and desire, to bring her nephew's name into the discussion. "Even if my energy flagged in cultivating them, Jasper would be assiduous enough for us both. He likes Fritz thoroughly, and Marguerite has a very strong influence over him."

Madeline kept her eyes fixed on some fancy work, but Mrs. Ormond leaned forward in her interest.

"And you do not object?" she exclaimed.

"I told you some time ago that I should never attempt to influence Jasper."

"But now that it comes home to you?"

"Oh, I think you misunderstand me. Marguerite is friendly to him. Nothing more," said Miss McKnight calmly. She knew that if she exhibited a trace of the dread which she felt of starting a rumor, the rumor would be quickly set on foot. "But as for giving Marguerite my most affectionate approval, that she has ungrudgingly," she added.

Mrs. Ormond grew thoughtful. What was good enough for Edna McKnight ought to be good enough for her. A certain relief and resignation stole over her.

Late that afternoon, Katherine came home.

Her mother regarded her critically, and was not altogether satisfied with the firm, controlled expression which had of late grown about her lips and eyes.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"To see Marguerite."

"Do you think she would like to receive with us at a reception I am going to give in a couple of weeks?"

Katherine looked up, astonished and pleased. "I am glad you are going to ask her," she said.

"We naturally would ask her, for the reception is to be the occasion of announcing your engagement."

"Mother!" In a second, Katherine's arms were about her mother's neck, and she was kissing her again and again, and pressing against hers a rose-leaf cheek wet with dew.

"There, there," said Mrs. Ormond; "what a fuss!" but she looked happy, too, and "teary 'round the lashes."

Katherine waited until she was alone with her sister before she asked: "Has the Wise Woman been here this afternoon?"

Madeline replied in the affirmative, and Katherine smiled like one satisfied.

The reception took place, and was a pleasant affair.

"Don't look so absurdly happy!" Mrs. Ormond said to Katherine, with a half-vexed laugh, before they went downstairs; but none of the

guests could have suspected that their gracious hostess had ever known a moment's disapproval of the young people, upon whom congratulations and good wishes were rained during three long hours.

Marguerite Laird smiled a little satirically as she stood looking regal beside Madeline's willowy prettiness. She was recalling that long-ago experience in this very room, when the girl now chattering to her so gayly had bowed her out with airs of patronage. Times had indeed changed. One proof of it was the glance she was receiving from time to time from Dr. McKnight. The young man was doing his duty gallantly in the crowded rooms, and heroically refrained from claiming more than this occasional refreshment of the eyes. Mrs. Ormond, appreciative of his kindness and his *savoir faire*, coveted him more than ever.

"That cold-hearted girl," she thought, mentally apostrophizing Marguerite; yet she approved her cold-heartedness. If she would continue to hold Gilbert and Jasper in strictly Platonic regard, Mrs. Ormond was prepared to acknowledge her, and give her the friendship due to Katherine's sister-in-law.

Dr. McKnight, however, took quite a different point of view from Mrs. Ormond's. When Marguerite came home from Pokonet, and he was again her neighbor, he began to manage to reach his office daily some time before his hour began. He had changed this from seven o'clock to five.

What more natural than that he should make use of that leisure period to call at the opposite flat.

Marguerite's treatment of him was not sufficiently frank to be discouraging, neither was it such as to give him hope that the time had arrived to urge his suit once more. Then, as soon as those calls of his threatened to become too frequent, the girl chose that hour of the afternoon to be absent from home.

Several times Dr. McKnight made vain attempts to see her, but the afternoon following the reception, he rang Marguerite's bell, and an expression of satisfaction came into Lucia's face as she opened the door. She approved of Dr. McKnight.

"She is at home to-day," she announced, with a sympathetic intonation.

"Lucia feels for me," he declared, smiling, as he held Marguerite's hand a second in her pretty parlor; "you go out so much. But I thought I should find you to-day. I reckoned on your fatigue."

"You were right," returned the girl, seating herself. "I feel astonishingly tired."

"You are not well," returned the caller quickly, observing the signs of the flushed face.

"Oh yes, I am. I may have taken a little cold last night. There was a breezy open window near me. The recent change in the weather was so sudden, too. Did you notice that delightful smell of frost in the air yesterday? So sugges-

tive of walking through fallen leaves in the autumn woods."

"Is your throat sore?" asked Jasper, continuing his scrutiny.

Marguerite smiled and drew her head up. "Rude man, you have n't answered my question; and supposing my throat is sore?"

"Why, I am going to give you some medicine."

"Do, if it will amuse you, but I ought to warn you that I never take any." She smiled at him with bright eyes.

He tried to take her hand. She drew it away.

"Give me your hand," he said peremptorily; and he had always been so deferential that she obeyed him in sheer astonishment.

"Yes," he said, after feeling her pulse. "Now I will just try your temperature."

"Thank you, I have no curiosity about it."

"But I have."

She gave him a look of somewhat excited defiance. "I have never been ill in my life. Can't you let me have a little feverish cold in peace? Really, Dr. McKnight," more and more hurriedly, for he was unscrewing the case of his thermometer, "it is n't any of your business, you know."

His dark eyes flashed at her. "I beg your pardon. It is more my business than that of any one in the world."

"Fritz did n't say I needed to have a doctor."

"Ah, then you felt ill before Fritz went away."

"No, not ill." She laughed nervously. "I

only had a little headache, and — and growing pains. I told Fritz I expected to be as tall as he was by the time he came home again."

"Let me see if you have fever;" he knew she had a high one. "You might as well be relieved early in your cold, as to let it run on."

She drew back into the corner of the divan where she sat. His insistent face and the look in his eyes made her heart beat fast.

"If you think I need a doctor, perhaps you will be kind enough to send me one," she said, rather breathlessly.

He smiled at her. "You are hard on me. I do not want any one else to take care of you."

"I would n't have you for anything," she returned, with decision. "I want somebody — experienced; yes, experienced."

Jasper swallowed his hurt as best he could. "Dr. Granbury, perhaps?" he suggested, beginning to put away his thermometer.

"Yes, Dr. Granbury. He paid me some very nice compliments last night. I like him," returned Marguerite hastily, smiling in her relief at so easily getting her way.

"I will see if he can come some time this evening. I hope you will soon be better," said Dr. McKnight, with some stiffness.

"Oh, I shall. It is nothing." All the same, when she rose from her seat, she staggered.

"You ought to be in bed," he said, holding her hot hand close.

She laughed into his grave face. "Ignominious, but true, I 've no doubt. I think I will follow your advice."

Jasper went downstairs immediately and telephoned to Dr. Granbury. Driving swiftly home after his office hour, he told his aunt of Marguerite's condition.

"I 'm afraid it 's all up, aunt Edna. There 's no hope," he said in closing, looking so white and miserable that she seized his arm.

"No hope, and she but just taken with it, whatever it is?" she returned, speaking with nervous energy. "What are you thinking of!"

"I was n't thinking of her illness. That may not amount to much, but I 've been hoping against hope that she cared for me more than she realized; and to-day" — He paused.

"What has happened? Did she say anything decisive? Remember, she was n't really herself."

"She would have turned to me, would have leaned on me, naturally, if I had been anything to her. She refused to let me take care of her; evidently preferred any other physician."

Miss McKnight stared at the gloomy, pale face, and then laughed, — her soft, cheerful laugh, which lifted her nephew's eyes to her in amazement at such untimely levity.

"You good-for-nothing, to give me such a scare! Did you really suppose she would let you take care of her?" The mirthful laugh burst forth again.

"Why not? No one else will care for her as I should."

"Oh, now, dear, Dr. Granbury knew considerable about his profession before you were born. Blind boy! If Marguerite had accepted your services, I should have warned you that you might as well give her up at once."

Jasper looked incredulous. "Do you really think that?"

"I would n't have given a penny for your chance. You are very nice, Dr. McKnight, and I am partial to you; but you are a man, and they are all dense just when they should n't be." Her nephew's face brightened. "Go on and send your elders and betters to that poor child at once. I hope it won't amount to anything."

Jasper found Dr. Granbury at home taking a hasty supper, and not in the best of humors.

"Did you get my telephone message?" asked the young man.

"Yes; just came in and found it. What 's the case?"

"Fever, pains in the limbs, and so on. I don't know what it is."

"In your neighborhood, is n't it?" asked Dr. Granbury, contracting his bushy eyebrows.

"Yes, in my building. I" —

"What do you bother me with it for, then?"

"It is a young lady. She does n't want me. She wants an older man. She wants you."

"Pah!" growled the old doctor. "I 've no

time to attend to these finicky notions. Let her take you or leave you. I 'm not going down to Montaigne to-night, to give a silly woman a dose of aconite."

"I promised to get you," said Jasper quietly. "It is Miss Laird. You talked with her last evening."

"Hey?" Dr. Granbury looked up, not relaxing his scowl, but cautiously interested. "Not the queenly, white girl, stood next to Chatterbox?"

His companion nodded. "That 's the one," he answered.

"Aha!" Dr. Granbury gulped down the last of his tea. His frown cleared. "Won't have you, hey?" he said, with a self-satisfied air. "Well, you 'll be older some day, my boy. Fever and aching may mean so many things. I guess I can spare time to see what 's the matter with Miss Laird."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LA GRIPPE'S VICTIM.

It proved that the wicked witch, La Grippe, prowling about in peaceful Montaigne, searching most unseasonably and greedily for a victim, had found Marguerite, rather down in resisting power from much mental conflict and self-analysis, and pounced upon her. The girl grew so ill that very evening that Fritz would not leave her. His note of explanation to Katherine made the latter implore to be allowed to go and nurse her friend; but Mrs. Ormond and Madeline both protested strenuously. There was no telling what sort of illness Marguerite's might prove to be.

Naturally, Katherine, in much distress of mind, betook herself directly after breakfast next morning to her never-failing Wise Woman, whom she found as busy as a bee, making plans to leave her house for a few days in the charge of the servants.

"Don't worry, my dear," said Miss McKnight cheerily, while her caller followed her about. "Marguerite is strong and elastic. Dr. Granbury says she has the Grip. A little while ago everybody had either malaria or nervous prostration. Now it is the Grip. All the same, it is

very likely that the girl has a feverish cold, and will be about in a few days."

Katherine smiled. "You don't seem to have a proper reverence for doctors' opinions."

"Sometimes I venture to hope they are mistaken. At all events, I am going to invite myself to stay with Marguerite a few days, and see to her a little."

"It is such a relief to my mind," said Katherine, with a sigh. "Lucia is n't enough, I am sure."

She stayed with Miss McKnight until the latter's preparations were finished; then they got into the carriage together and drove to the Ormonds', where Katherine bade her friend good-by, earnestly requesting to be allowed to be of use, if possible.

Miss McKnight drove on to the post-office, returning by the railroad station. As she was passing, she thought she saw a familiar figure on the platform. She ordered the driver to stop, and looked again.

In an instant, she recognized the tall, shawled figure as Mrs. Hodgson, who, valise in hand, was standing, looking about her undecidedly. Catching her eye, Miss McKnight beckoned to her. The horses moved up by the platform.

"Why, I am so surprised to see you, Mrs. Hodgson. Get right in here with me, won't you? James, you take the valise by you."

The new-comer accepted the invitation gratefully.

"I was just thinkin' of gettin' a carriage," she said.

Miss McKnight took her hand cordially. "I suppose, of course, you have come to see Marguerite. I am sorry to tell you she is not well."

"I know it," returned Mrs. Hodgson, turning her faded eyes on her companion. "Poor Rita. Fritz telegraphed for me last night, and Pa told me to come right along. He can just about live at the Berrys', take his meals there and all that, so I caught the early train this mornin'."

"Why, I was just on my way to nurse Marguerite myself," declared Miss McKnight. "See, here is my satchel."

Mrs. Hodgson smiled. "The child 's got good friends," she said. "I guess her aunt 's the one to look after her, though. They 've been lucky, those children have. Whenever I think about Fritz gettin' Kitty Ormond, it makes my heart swell right up. He wrote us about it, and I did n't know but Pa 'd scandalize us in the neighborhood. He hurrahed right out on the porch, and scampered 'round the house like a boy o' twenty. I can most generally manage him; but that day I had to just let him carry on." Mrs. Hodgson sighed anxiously. "I only hope Rita ain't goin' to be taken now, to even up things."

"My dear Mrs. Hodgson!" Miss McKnight looked shocked. "Don't think of such a thing. If you want me for anything, Lucia, Marguerite's little maid, knows how to telephone me. I shall hear from you often, any way."

Whether or no Marguerite's illness was considered serious from the doctor's standpoint, there was no doubt of its seriousness from her own point of view. Her fever ran high. Her own nose and eyes and mouth and tongue were spirited away, and their places supplied by misfits which La Grippe knows how to secure from some grim pawnshop. The pains which the witch induced were so fantastic and versatile as to betray her nationality; but the thirst which Marguerite endured was worst of all. Her throat was painful and unmanageable, and under these circumstances it doubtless appealed to the witch's sense of humor to hear the doctor state that the victim could have all the water she wanted; but not content with interposing physical obstacles to quenching the devouring thirst, La Grippe stood by, and into each refreshing glass dropped a pinch of original flavoring, which altered every drop to something repulsive.

Water? There was no water in the world. This pure, sparkling liquid that they offered Marguerite under its name was the cup of Tantalus. She remembered well how water used to taste, and a yearning for the joy of satisfying thirst colored all her thoughts in those feverish days. She would take her few, difficult, distasteful drops through a tube, and then lie back to think with feverish enthusiasm of fountains and rivers, of marshy, sedgy banks where rushes grew, and water-birds dipped their wings.

"When I could drink, and water was good, why did n't I drink more and oftener? Why did I do anything else?" she asked herself, trying to find a cool spot on her pillow, and maddened by the cool clink of pitcher and glass in her aunt's hands.

"Ah, aunt Althea," she murmured one day, "mine has been a misspent life."

"Dear heart, don't fret," returned Mrs. Hodgson tenderly. "Most likely thinkin' about what a worldly winter they 've spent," she reflected, shaking her head.

"' As the hart panteth after the water brooks,' " continued Marguerite feverishly. "How much that means. How intense it is. I never dreamed before what strength lay in those words."

"She 's a pretty sick girl," said Mrs. Hodgson to Fritz that night at supper, and then she quoted the evidence of Marguerite's awakened conscience. "I tell you, sickness is powerful to search the heart, and when Rita come out with that, I knew she was thinkin' some pretty serious thoughts."

Sheldon's face was full of concern. "Rita's a misspent life? What blessed nonsense," he returned; "but what did the doctor say to-day? Did he seem anxious?"

"He did n't show it any. That Dr. McKnight acts kind o' queer, Fritz. He 's in here most every day on some excuse or other. I had to just pointedly tell him that Rita 'd taken against roses, and then he began to fetch other things; and he 's

asked me questions by the dozen. I tell you," Mrs. Hodgson spoke confidentially, "it looks very much to me as if that young feller *wanted* the *case.*"

Sheldon smiled at his plate. His aunt's putting amused him. Although he was unconscious of Miss McKnight's strictures upon physicians, he knew that this time Jasper had not forgotten the individual in the case, and that he did want her with all his soul.

"He is very friendly," was all he replied.

After supper, Fritz went, as usual, to have his evening visit with Marguerite. Mrs. Hodgson's talk had awakened his anxiety, and it was a relief to find his sister's greeting no different from what it had been during the last few days.

He sat down by the bedside, close to the familiar little table with its bowl of crushed ice and its glasses.

Eagerly, Marguerite slipped her burning hands into his. "I 'm glad your hands are so big, Fritz, for they are always so cool," she said, in the difficult, breaking voice which La Grippe had substituted for her own. "I 've been thinking while you were at tea, what I would like best of anything to do. I would like to lie back in a river among the sedges near the bank, and draw the long, wet grasses through my hands. The first time I did it, the grasses would scorch and wither under my touch; the second time, they would dry as my hands passed up over them; but the third

time, they would stay wet and cool, and I should be wet and cool, through and through."

"Are you so hot, poor little Rita?"

"I have been deciding, too, what creature best enjoys drinking."

"I guess it 's ducks, ain't it, dearie?" suggested Mrs. Hodgson, who was standing at the foot of the bed.

"No, it 's horses. Tell me, Fritz, how they do it. Talk to me about it."

So Fritz, holding her hands, fell into her mood, and told her, as if she had been a little child, how the horses, hot and tired, came eagerly to the mossy trough where a spring welled up, and plunging their velvet noses into the refreshing water, drank and drank great draughts.

"I can make a noise almost like it with a big sponge in a washbowl," interrupted Marguerite, watching him with a beatific expression. "I tried to-day; and when I get well, I 'm not going to live as I have done." Mrs. Hodgson's head here dropped to one side, but straightened up slowly in her surprise at what followed. "I am going to divide my time into three parts. You know these shallow, swift rivers that flow over little rocks and yellow sand?"

Fritz, smiling into the flushed face, assented.

"One third of my life I am going to spend lying in such a river with only my face out; one third I shall sit among cat-tails and sedges watching the water-birds; and the remaining time I

shall spend drinking at a fountain. I have the fountain all planned. There are two Naiads with rushes growing and clinging around them, and one holds a pitcher up high, laughing down at the other, who tries to reach it and can't. I was going to have her hold a shell at first, but such a narrow bit of water came from the shell I could n't bear it; so I changed that and used a pitcher that a broad stream could pour from. Whoever builds me that fountain I will love forever; for I am going to stand under it with a goblet" —

"Hush, Rita, you must n't talk so much, dear," said Mrs. Hodgson. "She 's as crazy as a loon," she thought. "Fritz, it won't do," she added aloud. "He 'll go away, Rita, if you don't stop talking."

Marguerite sighed uneasily on her pillow, but meekly fell silent. She was quite sane now; but night was coming on with its fantastic hallucinations, and she knew that quiet was best.

But the day of La Grippe's triumphs and torments came to an end. Marguerite could sympathize with the Irishman, who described the witch's machinations as "a sickness that ye have six weeks afther ye get well;" yet her strength and fine constitution, aided by wise care and nursing, caused her convalescence to be swifter than is usual.

It was a season she ever afterward remembered as a time of especial sweetness. The extra affection shown her by Fritz as she began to be up

and about again, the devotion of Katherine and Miss McKnight, constituted an atmosphere of love, through which she felt with a secret thrill the pressure of that other and different love, which evidenced itself in every form but speech.

She no longer "took against roses," and her bower was fragrant of them. Each day she drove out with Miss McKnight, and although she frequently protested against resting so deep in the lap of luxury, the delightful conspiracy to spoil her continued.

Mrs. Ormond came to call upon her, and to express polite regret that Marguerite's assistance at her reception should have contributed to bring about her illness.

"I would n't know the place," said that lady to her daughters upon her return. She had been considerably surprised and impressed by the evidences of taste and even luxury in the little home, which she last remembered furnished with the milliner's rather meagre and utilitarian surroundings. "Those were gorgeous roses," she added. "I think Fritz is inclined to be extravagant, Katherine."

"Fritz did n't do it. He is too sensible to send coals to Newcastle." The girl smiled.

"Then I suppose it was your Wise Woman," remarked Mrs. Ormond tartly. "It is a wonder you are n't jealous, my dear. Your old place seems to be entirely usurped."

"And the Wise Woman did n't do it," returned

Katherine. "Her nephew prefers to attend to that duty."

"He will do anything for Edna," observed Mrs. Ormond, thinking resentfully of a time when Miss McKnight might have exerted her influence and would not.

"Not so much as he will do for Marguerite," said Katherine.

Her mother stared, but Madeline exclaimed, her little face alert with curiosity and interest.

"Do you really believe, Katherine Ormond, that he is serious?"

"Oh, he is serious enough. You won't doubt it the next time you see them together."

Mrs. Ormond, who had been removing her calling costume, sat down, her bonnet untied and the strings floating. "Has Marguerite Laird got Jasper?" she asked, in a desperate voice.

"Evidently she has," answered Katherine, equably; "but he has n't won her yet."

Mrs. Ormond's face brightened, and she clutched at the straw. She was not even yet prepared to be called upon to consider seeing Marguerite, of all people, in that coveted place. She sat a long time in her chair, her bodice unhooked and her bonnet awry, thinking. Should that strange girl remain cold, at least Mrs. Ormond would be spared seeing her the mistress of that mansion in the park. On the other hand, if she should yield, as no doubt she would, — her coldness in this case was probably only meant to draw Jasper on, —

there would be an advantage in Katherine's sister-in-law becoming Mrs. McKnight, since it was out of the question that her sister should ever fill that place.

Mrs. Ormond finally rose, and snatched off her bonnet with startling energy. She was consumed with longing to confront her dear Jasper, all fetters of conventionality removed, and to indulge in the gratifying process of boxing his ears.

That young man, meantime, was undergoing in these days a season of suspense still more sweet and bitter in its alternations than that which preceded his lady's illness. By heroic effort, he forced his treatment of Marguerite to be equable and friendly on the few occasions of their meeting. Her temporary weakness gave her a new, gentle dependence of manner which tempted him almost beyond his strength; but Miss McKnight stood guard over her. "Let the girl get well," she said to him warningly.

"She loves you, any way," he returned. In his optimistic moments, he told himself that Marguerite would not accept these attentions from his aunt, the daily drives, the dainty food, and so on, if she meant still to cut off the intimacy between herself and the Wise Woman; but in his moments of gloom, he saw these neighborly attentions in a very different light. Mrs. Hodgson had gone back to Pokonet, and Miss McKnight had assumed supervision of the convalescent and her home. In what bad taste it would be for Marguerite to repulse her.

Miss McKnight was far from being as hard-hearted and obtuse concerning her nephew's state of mind as he believed her. She had a tender appreciation of his suspense, and smiled upon the reckless floral offerings which were the only method of expression he ventured upon. Her shrewd insight perceived hope for him, too, and sometimes she let fall oracular remarks, intended to convey comfort to him in the state of pale and silent dignity to which he at times withdrew.

"Your father used to say that your mother's great charm to him lay in the fact that he had to shake the tree to get her."

"You won't let me shake the tree," returned Jasper curtly. "You will hardly let me see it. Either you or Fritz or Katherine or Gilbert, — somebody is always under foot."

His aunt repressed a desire to laugh. "Indeed?" she returned contritely. "Then I am going to do something nice for you. I will bring Marguerite to lunch with us a week from to-day. By that time she will be strong enough, I am sure."

Jasper would not betray his pleasure at this. He was more than half jealous just now of his aunt; but he counted off the following days, as they passed, with eager impatience. He was unusually busy this fall, but he registered a vow not to leave home at the call of the President himself on that particular Wednesday. It must be an eventful day. He would see Marguerite alone, and he should discover where he stood.

He had found consolation in Fritz the past month. The latter, full of fellow-feeling, had reported to his eager friend Marguerite's condition, her every word and look, with all the fidelity of which his memory was capable. He had long ago learned Jasper's hopes, and given them his sanction.

When the anticipated Wednesday dawned, the sun rose in Indian summer glory. Frost and cold seemed an illusion, though their traces were seen in brilliant dashes that gleamed amid the verdure of the park, as Marguerite drove into it.

To Miss McKnight's relief, Jasper had not insisted upon going to call for the guest. There was not supposed to be a host in evidence on this occasion; but Marguerite, rolling along in lonely state in the Victoria, thought of him, nevertheless. It was his carriage in which she was luxuriously seated; it was his home that she was approaching. These were his grounds where the woodbine flung its threads of vivid color around the evergreens, and the yellow and scarlet maples glowed warm.

"The day was made for you, my dear," said Miss McKnight, coming out on the piazza to meet her as the horses stopped before the house.

"I know. So many beautiful things are given me," answered the girl, feeling blessed and humble as she stood there with her hostess, and looked down, down, through the vista of autumnal foliage, to the town below.

Jasper did not appear until lunch time, and

Marguerite supposed that his duties would call him away immediately after the meal; but when they left the table, he showed no signs of departure.

He knew that it was his rose that Marguerite wore in the bosom of her dress. Did that mean anything? Miss McKnight, as she led the way to a cozy, gauze-inclosed nook of the piazza, felt for them both. Their ease she saw to be assumed. There was not a subject they could touch upon, but led to some suggestions that heightened their constraint. Jasper's pent-up feelings would not permit him to be talkative, and Marguerite was unnaturally glib.

"Poor children, they are afraid of each other, and more afraid that I shall discover it," thought Miss McKnight. "Well, I will rid them of one embarrassment."

She stifled a well-managed but obvious yawn. "Take that chair, Marguerite, I will warrant its comfort. This place is sacred to laziness."

Jasper regarded his aunt with evident and sombre impatience. Was she going to pin Marguerite down to a prosy three-cornered talk in this cushioned corner?

"Are you addicted to naps?" continued Miss McKnight, addressing her guest. "I dare say you feel the need of a little rest in these days."

"No, thank you, I don't; but if you are accustomed to a daily rest, please don't mind me. I dare say it would do me good to stop talking awhile. I shall be perfectly happy, reading."

"Well, I do like to lie down a little while," returned Miss McKnight apologetically, scarcely able to refrain from smiling at the manner in which the anxious sternness in her nephew's face melted away at her words. "If you two children can amuse yourselves together for half an hour" —

"Oh, I utterly refuse to detain Dr. McKnight a moment," interposed Marguerite, hastily turning toward him. "Please go on just the same as if I were not here."

"Indeed?" he remarked, meeting her eyes. "You are very considerate; but I have a holiday. Come. It is plain that aunt Edna can scarcely keep awake."

"Don't tire her, Jasper," said Miss McKnight warningly.

"Wise Woman, don't be so conceited." He held open a screen door for the guest to pass out upon the lawn, and looked back at his aunt. "I won't admit that you know how to take better care of Marguerite than I do."

"God bless the child, and lead her to decide wisely," thought Miss McKnight, watching the two figures move over the turf. She felt that the time for decision had come. A half-humorous, half-tender smile touched the corners of her lips. "I feel as if I ought to throw an old shoe after them," she murmured; then the pair disappeared around the corner of the house, and she sighed and lay back on her wicker couch.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WOODROW PARK.

"At last!" said Jasper.

He was scarcely conscious of having spoken aloud, until his companion darted at him a brief, half-timid look of surprise.

"It seems an eternity to me since those September days before you were taken ill," he added explanatorily.

"And to me, I assure you," she answered.

"Since you recovered, you have been continually hedged about. I have been waiting a long time, and I consider rather patiently, for an opportunity to see you alone."

He paused, regarding her, and Marguerite did not answer at once. She had never shown embarrassment with him before, and he hoped the red flag in her cheek was a favorable signal; but he was far from certain that it did not indicate distress.

"I had never been ill before," said the girl. "I suppose that is why the experience seems to have made the world over for me, just for a little while. I do not seem to myself quite the same person."

"Is it a better world?"

"It is more beautiful, more desirable than ever, yet I feel idle and irresponsible as yet — as if I had not fully waked up." The speaker smiled. "This weather aids and abets me in my laziness. With the passing of Indian summer, I promise myself to stop dreaming."

"I dream, too, Marguerite; but I am always waking myself up, on principle."

"How attached you must be to this place," said the girl, with swift irrelevance.

"I am; or I was before I knew it worked against me. What do you think of yourself for setting a man at variance with his home and those he ought to love best?" Jasper ventured upon the jest with a beating heart. He shrank from ending the suspense which, nevertheless, had grown unbearable. If Marguerite persisted in her rejection, he must accept it as final. She must know herself by this time. To-day must decide; yet to lose the hope of her would be to lose the zest out of life.

She appeared to consider his raillery unworthy an answer, and continued to glance about her at the well-kept grounds, where the effect of rusticity had been carefully preserved.

They were at the back of the house now, and Marguerite turned toward a wooded tract, where the autumn colors blazed in the soft, hazy air.

"That looks like real country," she said. "I should like to spend hours in those woods, alone, watching the birds."

"So you can, any time but to-day. Give me to-day." Jasper looked at her with a smile. "But I thought the only birds that interested you were wagtails and marsh-wrens, kingfishers, and all that sort of fowl."

The girl glanced at him questioningly a moment; then turned away. "That was too bad of Fritz," she said, laughing.

She did not see Jasper make a signal; but immediately a man leading two horses emerged from the barn, and walked toward a wide, grass-grown trough.

"The beautiful creatures!" said Marguerite gladly, and moved impulsively toward the animals.

"They do seem to take solid satisfaction out of the flowing bowl," remarked Jasper, as the eager heads bent to the clear water which the man pumped down.

Marguerite cast a suspicious glance at her companion, but his eyes were fixed on the dilating nostrils of the thirsty creatures.

"What a beautiful coat," she said, smoothing the glossy side of the horse next her.

"Yes, they are a fine pair; but I hope you will like them wisely, and not too well."

"What harm could I do them?"

"None. I should be the sufferer."

Marguerite blushed hotly, as if the groom could understand.

"I am glad they happened to want to drink just now," she said hastily.

"Shall we explore the woods a little?" suggested Jasper, when the horses lifted their heads, satisfied.

Marguerite assented. Life seemed full to her, as she walked slowly with him along the grassy incline toward the shadow of the woods. None of those questions that had vexed her in the careful, responsible days, so little while passed, disturbed her now. The clear-cut, pale face of the man beside her filled all her sight, whether she glanced at him or no. The jealousies and criticisms of those who coveted him touched her no longer. All the fragrant air seemed hushed and attentive as they passed. It was the brief, enchanted season when the whole world becomes subservient and sympathetic to the emotions of two souls.

The wondrous stillness of the woods seemed eloquent to her as they passed within. The sunlight pierced through ardent colors amid the green leafage. A little brook, made full by fall rains, murmured mysteriously at the bottom of a ravine. They descended its bank, and sat down on a mossy log.

"You didn't tell me there was a brook!" said Marguerite, sighing blissfully. "That makes it perfect."

"It is putting its best foot forward in honor of you, too," returned Jasper. "It isn't always so full; but see these grasses and reeds. If you still meditate the same occupations in life you planned a little while ago, you could scarcely find a better place."

Marguerite smiled. "I like it now almost as much as I thought I did then; but Fritz had no right to betray my confidence, and let you laugh at me, too."

"I am a lover of water as well as you. Let me show you the design of a fountain I am about ordering." Jasper took from his pocket a paper, and unfolded it.

Spreading the handsome drawing before Marguerite's view, he remained silent. The girl, leaning her chin in her hand, regarded the picture with interest a second before she realized what it was; but in an instant she recognized her Naiads, sportively struggling among their clinging rushes for the possession of a pitcher, whose stream had once seemed to her craving as the water of life.

"Dr. McKnight!" she ejaculated in her surprise, even the tips of her ears reddening.

He rested his arm on his knee and looked into her face. "Do you remember what you said you would do for him who would build this fountain?"

"No," answered the girl, gazing fascinated at the elaboration of her feverish dream.

"You said you would love him forever," said Jasper steadily, as pale as the paper before them.

Marguerite turned her head slowly toward him. "Then you have told — then Fritz wants" —

"For once it does n't matter what Fritz wants," interrupted Jasper, his voice sounding hard in his self-repression. "This concerns only you and me. I have been a coward, Marguerite. I am

a coward still. I dread what you will say to me, because it will be the decisive word. There are women who yield to importunity; but you are not one of them. Never mind that plaything," for Marguerite had looked mechanically back at the picture. "It was a pleasure to me to plan it, because it connected me with your thought, at a time when I could get no nearer; but now we are together. Marguerite!" His voice stopped.

The girl looked again into the white, controlled face, and under her gentle eyes its tension lessened.

"I have been so anxious not to deceive you," she said softly.

"That would be impossible."

"Yes, I should not deceive you unless I deceived myself first; but that was what I feared. There was a glamour about you, as I told you at Pokonet. I never could be sure that I considered you, purely — you, alone; but since my illness, since I am well again, I" —

"Yes?" said Jasper eagerly, as she paused.

"I am so happy," said Marguerite, coloring, and speaking the words slowly, — "so happy that it is unreasonable, unless" —

"Unless what, my darling?" His arms were around her, and he was trembling under the revulsion of feeling.

She yielded to him with a look that blessed.

"Unless it is — you, alone," she breathed; and the wood was as a wood in the garden of Eden,

for heaven's own happiness glorified that nook where the little brook flowed jubilantly, scattering its diamonds over ferns and grasses, and singing a song of thanksgiving.

The Wise Woman waited long for their return, but at last she saw them coming slowly up the velvety slope, the afternoon sunshine turning Marguerite's hair to gold as the dark head of her boy bent above it.

"Whatever is, is right," she thought; for a little stricture suddenly tightened her heart-strings. Was it apprehension lest Jasper had been denied, or a moment's jealous struggle in giving him to another? She did not know; but when the two came nearer, and she met Jasper's warm, triumphant gaze, and the unutterable expression of Marguerite's clear eyes, pure gladness shone in her welcoming face as she met them with outstretched hands.

"Thank God, dear children," she said tenderly, "you have come back — together!"

In the following June, Mrs. Jasper McKnight gave a garden party in honor of her brother and his bride, who had just returned from their wedding trip. The weather was favorable, and the occasion festive.

Mrs. Ormond sat with her friend Mrs. Allington under an awning, and cast approving glances toward Madeline, who, in dainty summer costume and the most picturesque of large hats, was bring-

ing the full battery of her charms to bear upon Mr. Ben Allington.

"How swiftly events move sometimes," said Mrs. Allington. It seems as if we had scarcely recovered from the surprise of Dr. McKnight's engagement when here we are, his wife's guests, and it all seems as natural as possible."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Ormond blandly. "Marguerite is a charming woman; a little eccentric and capricious in her nature, perhaps, — so unlike our dear Fritz in that, but still charming in her own way. Of course, Jasper has always been precisely like a brother to my children; so," with a significant little smile, "perhaps we were not so surprised as others when his engagement was announced."

"It does seem such a happy circumstance that Miss McKnight and the young wife are so in harmony," said Mrs. Allington. "Miss McKnight does not seem to have lost anything, and she certainly behaves as if she had gained a daughter."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Ormond. "We all have our little weaknesses, and I fancy Edna thinks more than most people of family and descent. You know Fritz and Marguerite quite pride themselves on their good blood, and after all, it does tell, don't you know. I hardly wonder Edna feels so. How charming Frances looks to-day," added Mrs. Ormond suavely, looking across the lawn to where Gilbert was shielding Miss Allington with her white parasol. "Oh, these young

people! How they charm us, and what an anxiety they are!" Mrs. Ormond's interests were at present chiefly centred, and, so far as Madeline was concerned, with good reason, upon the Allington family. Mr. Ben Allington always gazed and pulled his mustache and listened, smiling as if he were bewitched, to Miss Ormond's airy chatter.

"Your heart must be at rest about Katherine," returned Mrs. Allington. "I have stared at her, unconscionably, this afternoon. There is something beautiful in her expression. I think the sight of a real love-match like that is good for us all."

"The dear children are certainly very happy," returned Mrs. Ormond, and Miss McKnight, approaching from behind and overhearing, could not restrain a smile at the modestly virtuous tone.

"Which children are you talking about?" she asked gayly, drawing near. "Yours or mine?"

"They are all four yours, and all four mine, Edna," replied Mrs. Ormond graciously.

"Ah, thank you. How do you like Jasper's latest pet, our new fountain?"

"I was remarking to Mrs. Ormond a few minutes ago how charming and unique the design is," returned Mrs. Allington, her eyes again seeking the marble figures.

"Jasper's own idea, I suppose," said Mrs. Ormond.

"No, Marguerite's," answered Miss McKnight. As she spoke, Marguerite and her husband ap-

proached the basin into which the water bubbled from among the reeds, and flowed from the uplifted pitcher with a cooling sound.

Marguerite, in her white gown, her coppery hair glinting, extended a crystal goblet to catch the plashing stream. Jasper held back the crisp folds of her dress, and both were laughing.

Fritz and Katherine passed near the group under the awning, on their way to greet some guests.

"Does Marguerite prefer that to frappé?" asked Mrs. Ormond. "What is she doing?"

Fritz smiled slowly. "Fulfilling a vow," he answered.

The orchestra on the lawn played a serenade. The sun shone, the fountain sparkled as it splashed, and Marguerite and Jasper, looking into one another's eyes, made of the goblet a loving-cup.

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